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‘DARK, DEPRESSING RIDDLE’: GERMANS, JEWS, AND THE MEANING OF THE *VolK* IN  
THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL ALTHAUS

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## DECLARATION

The thesis has been composed by the candidate and is the candidate's own work.



Ryan Tafilowski  
Ph.D. Candidate

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis centers on Lutheran theologian Paul Althaus (1888–1966), one of the most contentious figures of twentieth-century Protestant theology and an architect of the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph*. Althaus has been the object of a polarising scholarly debate on account of his ambiguous relationship to National Socialism and his ambivalent views on the so-called ‘Jewish Question.’ The investigation of the latter of these two points is the chief research objective of the thesis. That is, how did Althaus understand the ‘Jewish Question,’ especially in its theological dimension, and what did he envision as its solution?

In the following pages, I suggest that Althaus fits together two separate but coherent strands of thought—inclusion and exclusion—into a paradoxical socio-theological vision for the Jews. The predominance of the scholarly literature falters on his theology of Jews and Judaism because it interprets the evidence more or less according to a binary model (philosemitism/antisemitism or inclusion/exclusion). But on this point Althaus resists facile classification because his approach to the ‘Jewish Question’ is *dialectical*. As such, it requires a dialectical interpretive approach to account for the function of ‘Jews’ within the wider logic of his theological system, including his doctrines of creation, the church, and the state. The study’s ultimate conclusion is that Althaus comes to interpret Jewish existence according to a *dialectic of pathology and performance* (according to which Jews are both a danger to and an indispensable factor for the life of the German *Volk*), resulting in an *inclusive quarantine* of Jewish persons within both civil and ecclesial communities.

The argument proceeds along four movements. The first movement considers Althaus’ *völkisch* writings during the Weimar Republic (1918–1933) in order to uncover the basic categories—pathology and performance—through which Althaus interprets Jewish existence. Movement II surveys Althaus’ attitudes toward the Jews under National Socialism (1933–1945), with special reference to the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph*, a document which recommended that Jewish men be restricted from pastoral office in the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*. Movement III demonstrates that, even in the knowledge of the Nazi regime’s crimes against the Jews, Althaus relinquished the dialectic of pathology and performance only gradually and incompletely in the postwar period (1945–Althaus’ death in 1966). The dissertation’s fourth movement approaches Althaus as a case study in the viability of Lutheran social ethics in light of his xenophobic articulation of the doctrine of the orders of creation. Insofar as Althaus brought this doctrine to bear on questions concerning the place of Jews in German society and in the German churches, his example raises broader dogmatic questions for a post-*Shoah* world. The thesis concludes with a proposal for doctrinal repair with resources found within the Lutheran tradition itself, with particular attention to the *theologia crucis*.



## CHAPTER I | INTRODUCTION

Where Paul Althaus is known in the anglophone world, he is known, as likely as not, as something of a villain. Althaus (1888–1966), longtime professor of systematic theology in Erlangen, has been obscured behind the Protestant giants of the twentieth century, save for a degree of unwelcome notoriety (and later, infamy) as the theologian who greeted the rise of National Socialism as ‘a gift and miracle of God.’<sup>1</sup> Beyond this, though, he appears in many respects as a perfectly ordinary Protestant thinker, and a curious choice for a doctoral dissertation. In the words of Paul Knitter, Althaus

may be considered one of the lesser stars in the theological constellation of this century. . . . He gathered no theological school around himself, he ignited no theological bombs, he offered no shatteringly new insights. Althaus was a thinker who had something to say, who was respected and listened to; but he was not—like Barth, Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and Tillich—one of the ‘fashioners’ of Protestant thinking of this century.<sup>2</sup>

His theology was not epoch-making, but Althaus did exercise wide influence, especially in Lutheran circles, as a systematician and ethicist, biblical exegete, and as a pastor and preacher. He was perhaps the preeminent Luther scholar of his generation, having followed his mentor Karl Holl as the president of the prestigious Luther Society, a post he held for over three decades until 1964. He was a prolific writer whose work was read ‘all over Germany.’<sup>3</sup> He remains a central figure in the history of Lutheran confessionalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Das Ja der Kirche zur deutschen Wende,’ in *Die deutsche Stunde der Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934), 5. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from German texts are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Knitter, *Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions: A Case Study of Paul Althaus and Contemporary Attitudes*, Marburger Theologische Studien (Marburg: N.G. Elwert Verlag, 1974), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Karlmann Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie* (Erlangen: Martin Luther Verlag, 1993), 184. For a sympathetic overview of Althaus’ life and work, see Wenzel Lohff, ‘Paul Althaus,’ in *Tendenzen der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Geschichte in Porträts*, ed. Hans Jürgen Schultz (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1966). For an exhaustive bibliography of Althaus’ publications, see Wenzel Lohff, ‘Bibliographie der Veröffentlichungen von Professor D. Paul Althaus,’ in *Dank an Paul Althaus: Eine Festgabe zum 70. Geburtstag, dargebracht von Freunden, Kollegen, und Schülern*, ed. Walter Künneth and Wilfried Joest (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1958), 246–72. For a bibliography specific to Althaus’ Luther scholarship, see Gottfried Petzold, ‘Veröffentlichungen von

Althaus' enduring significance, however, is in large part an accident of history. He was at the height of his intellectual powers and professional prestige at the moment of the Nazi *Machtergreifung*; the prime of his career coincided directly with the National Socialism's short-lived tenure. As a result, despite his irenic personality he found himself at the centre of the explosive theological debates of those turbulent years. Chief among these debates, and the subject of this study, was the so-called *Judenfrage*. The 'Jewish Question'—that is, 'the constant discussion in German society about the proper status of Jews'<sup>4</sup>—dominated public discourse during the waning years of the Weimar Republic.

Although the 'Jewish Question' had been chiefly a socio-legal discussion among scientists, politicians, and makers of social policy, it held a special theological content for Althaus. Beginning in the late Weimar period he would comment on the *theological* meaning of Jewish existence and its significance for German *Volksgemeinschaft*. By the early 1930s, Althaus had established a reputation as 'a knowledgeable expert on questions of Judaism' and a prominent interpreter of the 'Jewish Question.'<sup>5</sup> As Nazi measures against the Jews increased, he went on to play an instrumental part in deliberations about the place of Jewish persons in the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK). Along with colleague Werner Elert (1885–

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Paul Althaus über Luther, eine Auswahl,' *Luther* 29 (1958), 12–13. For Althaus' wide-reaching influence, see also Hertrich Volkmar, 'Paul Althaus dem Siebzigjährigen,' *Luther Jahrbuch* XXV (1958). See also Walther von Loewenich, 'Paul Althaus als Lutherforscher,' *Luther Jahrbuch* XXXV (1968), 9–47. On Althaus' contributions to German church practice, see Martin Nicol, 'Paul Althaus (1888–1966),' in *Gottesdienst als Feld theologischer Wissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert: Deutschsprachige Liturgiewissenschaft in Einzelporträts*, ed. Benedikt Kranemann and Klaus Raschzok, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 98 (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> The definition is Götz Aly's. See *Why the Germans? Why the Jews? Envy, Race Hatred, and the Prehistory of the Holocaust*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York, NY: Picador, 2014), 65. Aly offers a useful summary of the various social, financial, and cultural factors that contributed to discourse over the 'Jewish Question' from about 1800 to the rise of the NSDAP in the early 1930s. There are points, however, at which his analysis is perhaps too psychological: Germans are depicted as suffering from an inferiority complex on a national scale and Aly locates the prehistory of the Holocaust primarily in Germans' material envy of Jews.

<sup>5</sup> Marikje Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus und Judentum 1932/1933*, Heidelberger Untersuchungen zu Widerstand, Judenverfolgung und Kirchenkampf im Dritten Reich 2 (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1990), 282.

1954), he drafted the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph*, which is an important artefact not only of the *Kirchenkampf*, but also of the complex and ambivalent history of Christian antisemitism.

Althaus therefore remains an important case study for any Christian theologian with an interest in Jewish-Christian dialogue. His theology of the ‘Jewish Question,’ which reached its climax in a document that called for the prohibition of ‘Jewish’ pastors in the DEK, represents a unique permutation of Christian anti-Judaism, as I will argue below. What is striking about Althaus, moreover, is precisely his contextual moderacy. There are authoritarian and xenophobic components to his thought, but he was not a fanatic that one can easily dismiss or disregard. In fact, Althaus understood himself to be combatting what he considered wild racial antisemitism. In so doing, however, he problematised Jewish existence in ways more subtle, but no less damaging, than his more openly-antisemitic contemporaries. Moreover, some elements of his brand of moderate anti-Judaism remain largely evident in Christian theology after the *Shoah*. Simply put, Althaus was a centrist—a prospect that ‘must be frightfully unsettling for moderate and conservative theologians of every time and place.’<sup>6</sup>

Althaus’ approach to the ‘Jewish Question’ is a poignant example of the ways in which orthodox doctrines (especially in the Lutheran tradition) can be distorted into complicity with toxic ideologies. The study focuses narrowly on Althaus, but with a broader view to the viability of Lutheran dogmatics, specifically the doctrine of the orders of creation, as a suitable basis for the ethical enterprise. In recent days this kind of historical investigation into ethno-nationalist theologies has taken on a

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<sup>6</sup> Jack Forstman, *Christian Faith in Dark Times: Theological Conflicts in the Shadow of Hitler* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 202.

greater urgency, as Christian theologians must once again wrestle with questions of national and ecclesial self-understanding under the pressures of the mass migration and resurgent nationalisms, both in Europe and North America.

## ONE | STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

‘Jewry [*das Judentum*],’ wrote Althaus in 1930, ‘represents a *völkisch* question, without doubt. But today it is more important to emphasise that Jewry poses a theological question!’<sup>7</sup> For Althaus, the ‘Jewish Question’ had two distinct yet interrelated dimensions: one socio-political and one theological (although the two dimensions often coincided). Like many of his contemporaries, he worried over the socio-political influence of the ‘Jewish spirit’ as it mounted a ‘foreign invasion’ [*Überfremdung*] into the public sector. He spoke of Judaism and its diseased spirituality as a ‘threat’ to German life. He looked on in despair as the infection spread; ‘the Jews’ came to represent everything he feared most: secularism, urbanism, and modernism.<sup>8</sup> So far, Althaus is hardly unique; a distinct ‘Protestant antisemitism’ shaped the prevailing mentality of most pastors and churchmen in his Bavarian context.<sup>9</sup> Antisemitic rhetoric targeting Jews as both the spiritual and cultural enemies of the German *Volk*, such as that of Adolf Stoecker, for instance, had been circulating since the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> But for Althaus the ‘Jewish Question’ would always be first and foremost a theological question. And his theological deliberations on the meaning and destiny of Israel—what he called the

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Die Frage des Evangeliums an das moderne Judentum,’ *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 7 (1930), 196.

<sup>8</sup> So argues Robert Erickson in *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 108.

<sup>9</sup> See Axel Töhlner, *Eine Frage der Rasse? Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Bayern, der Arierparagraf und die bayerischen Pfarrfamilien mit jüdischen Vorfahren im ‘Dritten Reich,’* *Konfession und Gesellschaft* 36 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), especially 21–42.

<sup>10</sup> See Gerhard Lindemann, ‘Christian Teaching about Jews in Protestant Germany (1919–1945),’ *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 16:1 (2003), 37–41.

‘dark, depressing riddle’—did yield something unique: a dialectical interpretation of Jewish existence, according to which Jews are not to be expelled or assimilated, but quarantined.

This brings us to the project’s chief research question: how did Althaus understand the ‘Jewish Question,’ especially in its theological dimension, and what did he envision as its solution? Put another way, what did Althaus believe the purpose of Jewish existence to be? The answer is not straightforward. His theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ is rife with ambivalence, which is not the same thing as ambiguity: Althaus fits together two separate but coherent strands of thought—inclusion and exclusion—into a paradoxical socio-theological vision for the Jews. The predominance of the scholarly literature falters on his theology of Jews and Judaism because it interprets the evidence more or less according to a binary model (philosemitism/antisemitism or inclusion/exclusion). Yet on this point Althaus resists facile classification because, in my view, his approach to the ‘Jewish Question’ is *dialectical*. As such, it requires a dialectical interpretive approach to account for the function of ‘Jews’ within the wider logic of his theological system, including his doctrines of creation, the church, and the state. This dialectical reading is the primary contribution of the thesis.<sup>11</sup>

Namely, I argue the following: beginning in Althaus’ Weimar writings, Jews are portrayed as existing in a dialectical relationship to all human communities, but especially to Germans. According to this dialectical relationship they must be contained because of the danger they pose to the peoples around them and yet

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<sup>11</sup> Scholars of Hegel will be disappointed to learn that there is, so far as I can tell, no moment of *Aufhebung* in Althaus’ theology of the ‘Jewish Question.’ The dialectic of pathology and performance, as I will argue in chapters six and seven, remains unresolved right up through the end of his life. Inclusion and exclusion, pathology and performance, are never sublimated into a higher unity, but rather continue to co-exist in an uneasy equilibrium.

preserved within every society on account of their performative symbolic functions. Althaus therefore handles the ‘Jewish Question’ according a *dialectic of pathology and performance*. The result is a vision that I have elsewhere called *inclusive quarantine*—inclusive, because Jews are conceived as an indispensable factor in the life of the *Volk*; quarantine, because Althaus invokes the language of pathology and infection to characterise the nature of Jewish relationship to other peoples. In this paradoxical framework, Jewish persons simultaneously threaten to destroy the communities—both civil and ecclesial—in which they are situated while also performing constructive theological functions for those same communities.<sup>12</sup>

‘In his comments [on the ‘Jewish Question],’ explains Axel Töllner, ‘Althaus fluctuated between insight into the special role of the Jews, which was somehow salvation-historical in nature, and the perception of a fundamental cultural and ethnic foreignness between Jews and Germans.’<sup>13</sup> Althaus, then, regarded the Jews as a people both vitally important and utterly strange. As a result, he contemplated neither the total inclusion nor the total exclusion of Jewish persons from German society, but rather envisioned the Jews as a foreign *Volk* both *a part of* and *apart from* other human communities. In this respect, his theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ possesses a dynamism and complexity beyond much of the unsophisticated anti-Judaism of his era. At the same time, the dialectic of pathology and performance is a subspecies of what Stephen Haynes has called the ‘dialectic of fear and necessity,’ a tension which defines much Christian thinking about Jews.<sup>14</sup> This should come as no surprise: Althaus conceptualised Judaism within the confines of the classical ‘witness people’

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<sup>12</sup> See Ryan Tafilowski, ‘Inclusive Quarantine: The Pathology and Performance of Jewish Existence in the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph*,’ *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 10:1 (2015): 1–29.

<sup>13</sup> Töllner, *Eine Frage der Rasse?*, 35.

<sup>14</sup> See Stephen Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses: Jews and the Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 184.

mythology that has dominated the Christian imagination since the patristic age. Even though Althaus amends the mythology in significant ways, his general approach conforms to the historical pattern: Jews are dangerous but indispensable.

## **TWO | BIOGRAPHY AND INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES**

In the spring of 1947 Althaus found himself in an unexpected position: called to account for his political attitudes before the Allied denazification commission. He searched his international contacts in an effort to debunk allegations of his entanglement with National Socialism. The report from abroad was disappointing. The English missiologist Nathaniel Micklem offered his honest but hardly resounding support. Micklem's response doubles as a concise summary of Althaus' reputation in the anglophone world:

I am quite certain that you will not have been a member of the Nazi Party, and I am quite certain that you must have hated much that was done by the Party. It would also be true to say that we have not in this country heard of your name as offering special resistance to the Nazis or their Church government [*sic*]. Your name is well known in this country as a theologian of weight and repute.<sup>15</sup>

Micklem's lukewarm endorsement presaged the controversy that has surrounded Althaus' legacy in the years since. The scholarly literature is divided on the question of how to understand his political commitments under National Socialism, yielding dissenting interpretations of the theological underpinnings of his political ethics. A central crux of the debate is whether there is some fatal flaw in his theology that rendered it susceptible to National Socialism. In particular, scholars have asked whether Althaus' doctrine of *Uroffenbarung* (primal revelation) and his *Theologie der Schöpfungsordnungen* (theology of the orders of creation) created a point of

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<sup>15</sup> Nathaniel Micklem to Paul Althaus, May 16, 1947, Althaus Nachlass 12.5, Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1. Hereafter, the Althaus Nachlass shall be referenced with the abbreviation 'NA' (Nachlass Althaus).

contact with the racial ideology of National Socialism.<sup>16</sup> There is no consensus on the precise nature and extent of Althaus' relationship to National Socialism. Nor is there an agreement on whether his posture toward Jews and Judaism has a distinct theological content, or whether those attitudes are symptomatic of his socio-cultural inheritance. We will return to these questions in due course.

It had not always been this way, however. In the decades before his removal from the professoriate (and subsequent reinstatement), Althaus had enjoyed a long and successful academic career, first at the University of Rostock, and then in Erlangen, where he remained until his death. Theology had always been in his blood. He was born the son of a Lutheran pastor, Paul Althaus the elder (1861–1925), who himself was professor of practical and systematic theology at the universities of Göttingen and Leipzig.<sup>17</sup> The year 1906 saw the younger Althaus undertake his own theological studies in Tübingen under the Swiss Reformed scholar Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938). Schlatter had a profound impact on Althaus, both personally and professionally. Althaus modeled his own church-oriented academic work after his mentor's, and he came to a special appreciation of the 'wideness' of Schlatter's theology. This wideness—the openness to God's activity in history, nature, and

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<sup>16</sup> Althaus expounded his famous (and controversial) doctrine most clearly in 'Ur-Offenbarung,' *Luther* 46:1 (1935), 4–32. For an overview of the concept, see Horst Pöhlmann, 'Das Problem der Ur-Offenbarung bei Paul Althaus,' *Kerygma und Dogma* 16 (1970): 242–58; Wenzel Lohff, 'Zur Verständigung über das Problem der Ur-Offenbarung,' in *Dank an Paul Althaus*, 151–70; and Joo-Hoon Choi, *Das Konzept der Ur-Offenbarung bei Paul Althaus: In seiner Bedeutung für die Stellung des Christentums unter den Weltreligionen*, Untersuchungen zum christlichen Glauben in einer säkularen Welt 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), chapter 3. On the doctrine of the orders of creation, see Walter Sparr, 'Paul Althaus,' in *Profile des Luthertums: Biographien zum 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Wolf-Dieter Hauschild (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1998), 7–12. For a comprehensive account of Althaus' *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* within the history of the Erlangen School, see Nathan Howard Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft: a critical appraisal of the Erlangen contribution to the orders of creation*, American University Studies VII:338 (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2016), chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Althaus d. Ä. was deeply influential for the younger Althaus, who edited a volume of his father's work which was published posthumously. He also wrote a biography of his father. See Paul Althaus, d. Ä., *Forschungen zur evangelischen Gebetsliteratur*, ed. Paul Althaus (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1927) and Paul Althaus, *Aus dem Leben von D. Althaus—Leipzig* (Leipzig: Dorffling and Franke, 1928). For an overview of Althaus' early life, see Gotthard Jasper, *Paul Althaus (1888–1966): Professor, Prediger und Patriot in seiner Zeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 18–32.



human experience—is discernible in Althaus' own doctrine of *Uroffenbarung*.<sup>18</sup> It is also possible that Althaus inherited part of his deep ambivalence toward Jews and Judaism from Schlatter; their views in the mid-1930s bear a significant resemblance.<sup>19</sup>

In Tübingen Althaus also studied with the famed church historian Karl Holl (1866–1926), a chief architect of the so-called Luther Renaissance. From Holl Althaus took a commitment to the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith and a focus on the connection between systematic and existential questions in Luther's theology.<sup>20</sup> Holl himself had an affinity for authoritarian politics—he had joined the *Vaterlandspartei* movement in 1917—and this impacted his interpretation of Luther, whom he regarded as something of a German folk-hero.<sup>21</sup> Althaus went on to Göttingen to work with the Luther scholar Carl Stange (1870–1959), with whom he would later co-edit the *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* beginning in 1923. In

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<sup>18</sup> See Paul Althaus, 'Adolf Schlatters Gabe an die systematische Theologie,' in *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*, ed. Paul Althaus (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1938). For more on Schlatter's influence on the young Althaus, see Gotthard Jasper, 'Theologiestudium in Tübingen vor 100 Jahren—im Spiegel der Briefe des Studienanfängers Paul Althaus an seine Eltern,' *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologiegeschichte* 13:2 (2006).

<sup>19</sup> Schlatter published an antisemitic tract in 1935, by which time Althaus had already made several public remarks on the 'Jewish Question.' See Schlatter, *Wird der Jude über uns siegen? Ein Wort für die Weihnachtszeit* (Essen: Freizeiten Verlag zu Delbert im Rheinland, 1935). It is worth noting that two of Schlatter's other pupils, Gerhard Kittel and Walter Grundmann, 'became leading figures in National Socialist exegesis,' in the words of Anders Gerdmar. See his *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann*, *Studies in Jewish History and Culture* 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 254. Kittel's exegetical work became notorious for its anti-Judaism. See Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler*, chapter 2 and Alan Steinweis, *Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 73–75. Grundmann founded the Institute for the Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life at the University of Jena. See Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), chapter 2.

<sup>20</sup> Walter von Loewenich, 'Paul Althaus als Lutherforscher,' 12.

<sup>21</sup> See James Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Savior: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917–1933* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000), chapter 2. Stayer argues that Holl and the Luther Renaissance provided resources for theologians who would later recruit Luther to support a *völkisch* worldview. This development is perhaps detectable in Althaus. For instance, see his *Luther und das Deutschtum* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1917) in which Althaus identifies Luther's personality and message as representative of the distinct German type. Roland Kurz has shown that, especially during the First World War, Althaus regarded Luther as the 'archetype of the German [*der Urtyp des Deutschen*].' See *Nationalprotestantisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik: Voraussetzungen und Ausprägungen des Protestantismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg in seiner Begegnung mit Volk und Nation*. *Die Lutherische Kirche—Geschichte und Gestalten* 24 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 423–25, 475. For further discussion of the influence of the Luther Renaissance on Althaus, see Karl Kupisch, 'The Luther Renaissance,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 2:4 (1967), 47–48.

the meantime, he completed his doctoral dissertation—*Principles of German Reformed Dogmatics*<sup>22</sup>—in 1914, the same year that saw his promotion to *Privatdozent* in Göttingen. The First World War, during which he worked as a chaplain at a military hospital and as a pastor among German expatriates in Łódź, Poland, interrupted his academic career until 1920, when he received a call to a professorship in systematic theology and New Testament at Rostock. Althaus was to make his name, however, as a champion of the Erlangen School.

By the time Althaus joined the faculty in 1925, Erlangen had been a bastion of confessional Lutheranism for generations. The faculty achieved its first golden age during the nineteenth century on the reputations of historical theologian Johann Hoefling (1802–1853), ethicist Gottlieb von Harless (1806–1879), and systematician Johann von Hofmann (1810–1877). Althaus and Elert, in the mind of at least one interpreter, led the way into the second golden age of Erlangen theology.<sup>23</sup> The Erlangen School, as Lowell Green has noted, is best thought of not as an institution, but as a theological method.<sup>24</sup> This method grew out of the revivalism movement [*Erweckungsbewegung*] of the eighteenth century, which in Erlangen took the form of a distinctive ‘theology of experience [*Erfahrungstheologie*].’<sup>25</sup> Above all, the Erlangen School understood itself as the opponent of theological liberalism. Since the Old Prussian Union of 1817, the Erlangen theologians occupied themselves with the tenacious defence of the confessional identity to such an extent that ‘Erlangen,’

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<sup>22</sup> Published as *Die Prinzipien der deutschen reformierten Dogmatik im Zeitalter der aristotelischen Scholastik* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1914).

<sup>23</sup> Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie*, 184.

<sup>24</sup> Lowell Green, *The Erlangen School of Theology: Its History, Teaching, and Practice* (Fort Wayne, IN: Lutheran Legacy, 2010), 28–29.

<sup>25</sup> Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie*, 24–25.

writes Reinhard Slenczka, ‘became a catchword for politically conservative, right-wing confessional theology.’<sup>26</sup>

The Erlangen School, as Hans Christof Brennecke has observed, has always straddled the line between Lutheranism and nationalism.<sup>27</sup> This penchant for conservative politics was compounded by a distinct theology of history. The School’s hallmark *Erfahrungstheologie* is characterised by an openness to God’s self-revelation in historical events and natural structures of communal life (such as the *Volk*). Harless and Hofmann were the early pioneers of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*, and their influence on Althaus’ thought-system is probably clearest here.<sup>28</sup> Following Hofmann’s emphasis on historical developments as episodes in *Heilsgeschichte*, Erlangen theologians began to regard history (including political and social movements) as the arena of God’s self-disclosure—a precedent that, of course, Althaus would fatefully seize upon in the early 1930s with his public endorsement of Hitler. By the middle of the 1920s, the Erlangen theologians, with Althaus, Elert, and church historian Hans Preuß (1876–1951) at the forefront, had already forged a distinctly *völkisch* approach to Lutheran theology, which was disseminated widely not only in Bavaria, but throughout Germany. ‘Through their programmatic synthesis of confessional Lutheranism and German *Volkstum*,’ explains Berndt Hamm, ‘[Althaus and Elert] attracted considerable

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<sup>26</sup> Reinhard Slenczka, ‘Paul Althaus: A Representative of the Erlangen School,’ *Logia* XXII:2 (2013), 6.

<sup>27</sup> See Hans Christof Brennecke, ‘Zwischen Luthertum und Nationalismus: Kirchengeschichte in Erlangen,’ in *Geschichtswissenschaft in Erlangen*, Erlanger Studien zur Geschichte 6 (Erlangen and Jena: Palm & Enke, 2000). For Brennecke, Erlangen’s history of parochial Lutheran confessionalism is ‘almost embarrassing’ in retrospect, and it culminated in the scholarship of Hans Preuß, an open supporter of National Socialism (262–67).

<sup>28</sup> ‘History, as the passage of God through the world as well as in an organic view of all other knowledge together with history and theology was an integral part of [the School’s] thought’ (Green, *The Erlangen School*, 34). On Harless and Hofmann, see Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 9–44.

attention and cleared a path, theologically and paradigmatically, for the Lutheran regional churches into National Socialism.’<sup>29</sup>

I have provided this brief sketch of Althaus’ intellectual development in order to situate his theology and to set the stage for the debate regarding his legacy. The exact nature of Althaus’ relationship to National Socialism is a question with which I have dealt elsewhere and is not of immediate concern to this thesis.<sup>30</sup> However, the wider discussion regarding Althaus’ political commitments is critical for our investigation insofar as it reveals the binary approach to the study of his socio-political theology. The dichotomous terms of the debate—where Althaus appears as a misguided patriot on one side and an ‘esteemed pastor-professor turned zealous Nazi’<sup>31</sup> on the other—expose a need for an alternative approach to Althaus research with a greater awareness of the ambivalence of his theological method in general and the dynamism of his theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ in particular. There exists at present no systematic attempt to elucidate Althaus’ approach to Jews and Judaism in the English language. Where this task has begun in German scholarly literature, there remains room for further inquiry into his complex theology of Judaism.

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<sup>29</sup> Berndt Hamm, ‘Werner Elert als Kriegstheologe: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Diskussion “Luthertum und Nationalsozialismus,”’ *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 11:2 (1998), 208. Though in my view he overstates the case, Hamm holds Elert more responsible than Althaus for this state of affairs. Elert’s bellicose ethical system, according to Hamm, ‘presents itself as precisely the kind of religiosity that a totalitarian and militaristic regime of the twentieth century must have welcomed’ (234). Gotthard Jasper, a much more sympathetic commentator than Hamm, nevertheless agrees that by the 1930s Erlangen theology had taken on a strongly *völkisch* tone, which eventually found an ‘echo’ in rising antisemitism and the National Socialist movement, ‘even though the men who produced the theology were neither radical antisemites nor National Socialists.’ See ‘Die Friedrich-Alexander-Universität in der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich,’ in *Erkenntnis durch Erinnern: Aufsätze und Reden*, ed. Everhard Holtmann (Erlangen und Jena: Palm & Enke, 1999), 257–58.

<sup>30</sup> See Ryan Tafilowski, ‘Exploring the Legacy of Paul Althaus,’ *Lutheran Quarterly* 31:1 (2017): 64–84.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 215. Elsewhere Marsh labels Althaus an ‘opportunist’ who colluded with National Socialism (192).

### THREE | BETWEEN GUILT AND INNOCENCE: THE LEGACY OF PAUL ALTHAUS

Political and theological decisions are complicated. As Anders Gerdmar has shown, theological antisemitism develops out of a myriad of factors, including cultural prejudice, nationalism, political pressures, and perhaps above all personal temperament.<sup>32</sup> It is therefore a precarious enterprise to establish Althaus' precise motives in his comments about the Jews. However, the scholarly debate has sought to uncover—and in some cases separate—the various influences that give his theology of Judaism its unique character. Discourse surrounding Althaus' legacy can be distilled roughly into two overarching narrative-types: narratives of suspicion and narratives of sympathy. Of course, no interpretation conforms completely to either narrative, but this schematic allows us to trace the general contours of the debate. As we shall see, the two narrative types, whose conclusions differ significantly, offer important insight into Althaus' theology of the Jews while at the same time presenting new problems and leaving important questions unresolved. Only in recent years have several studies emerged that challenge this dichotomous paradigm by discerning something of the ambivalent nature of Althaus' theology of the 'Jewish Question.'

Variants of what I have called the *narratives of suspicion* are characterised by close scrutiny of Althaus' political decisions surrounding the National Socialist years and by the ethical indictment of his *völkisch* theology. Althaus' critics are unanimous that his theology is antagonistic toward Jews, but there is some debate on the character of this antisemitism. Nonetheless, these narratives do not hesitate to speak of Althaus' guilt for legitimising a regime that perpetrated crimes against the Jews.

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<sup>32</sup> Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism*, 601–09.

For example, Richard Gutteridge charges Althaus as ‘the most evil German theologian in the National Socialist era, at least in terms of effect.’<sup>33</sup> Others have identified Althaus—and the theological tradition he represents—as an explicit organ of the genocidal war against the Jews.<sup>34</sup> While the exact judgments vary from author to author, this narrative condemns Althaus for lending theological credibility and pastoral license to National Socialist ideology. In many cases, criticism of Althaus amounts more or less to criticism of Lutheran political and social ethics in general. Althaus’ moral failure, so the argument goes, is the inevitable outcome of a flawed ethical system.<sup>35</sup> The shorthand version of this narrative type—‘Althaus, Nazi theologian’—has dominated English-speaking discourse in particular since the publication of Robert Ericksen’s seminal study *Theologians Under Hitler* in 1985.

Variants of what I have called the *narratives of sympathy* are generally charitable in their judgment of Althaus’ politics and more attentive to the ethical quandary in which many German clergy found themselves during the Third Reich. These narratives caution against moralising historiography of a time in which theological decisions were clouded by Nazism’s ambiguous relationship with Christianity, and by traditional Lutheran teachings on secular authority and statecraft. These interlocutors speak of Althaus’ unintentional complicity with National

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<sup>33</sup> Gutteridge’s comment was conveyed to Robert Ericksen in a personal interview. See Robert Ericksen, ‘The Political Theology of Paul Althaus: Nazi Supporter,’ *German Studies Review* 9:3 (1986), 564. For Gutteridge, ‘it is certain that [Althaus] enormously encouraged others altogether less well trained in theological sense and altogether more ardent and uncontrolled in pro-Nazi enthusiasm to attempt to justify a form of volkish [sic] outlook, such as his religious support and vindication of the Nazi racial program.’ See *Open Thy Mouth for the Dumb! The German Evangelical Church and the Jews 1879–1950* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1976), 274.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Steele: ‘[Althaus was] removed from the horrible physical acts of violence perpetrated against Other victims [but] distance does not serve to reduce [his] culpability.’ *Christianity, The Other, and the Holocaust* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 88–89. See also Arlie Hoover, ‘German Christian Nationalism: Its Contribution to the Holocaust,’ *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4:3 (1989), 314.

<sup>35</sup> For arguments of this type, see Wolfgang Tilgner, *Volksnomostheologie und Schöpfungsglaube: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 180; Eberhard Hübner, *Evangelische Theologie in unserer Zeit: Darstellung und Dokumentation* (Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1966), 97–101; Hans Tiesel, ‘The German Lutheran Church and the Rise of National Socialism,’ *Church History* 41:3 (1972), 331–35; and Forstman, *Christian Faith*, 121–32, 197–202.

Socialism, and can even speak of his innocence.<sup>36</sup> Virtually all scholars within this narrative type agree that Althaus should not be remembered as a perpetrator; his crime, ironically, was actually his ‘innocent naiveté [*unschuldsvolle Naivität*].’<sup>37</sup> This interpretation is mostly German in provenance, as many of these scholars are bound to Althaus by personal and confessional commitments.<sup>38</sup> The shorthand version of this narrative type—‘Althaus, misguided patriot’—seeks to counterbalance, and in some cases overturn, more damning portraits.

As these competing narratives seek to pull his legacy in different directions, Althaus for the time being remains suspended between guilt and innocence.

#### A | SUSPICION

Among the most critical accounts is that of British historian Richard Gutteridge, who isolates Althaus as the single most culpable theologian of the National Socialist era.<sup>39</sup> In Gutteridge’s interpretation, it is precisely Althaus’ moderate nature that makes him so sinister; his gravitas furnished National Socialism with a veneer of respectability, legitimising the movement in ways that crude forms of antisemitism and crass jingoism could not. Gutteridge’s conclusions are echoed later by American historian Arlie Hoover, who identifies Althaus as paragon and proponent of a toxic romantic-Christian Germanism.<sup>40</sup> For Gutteridge and Hoover, Althaus’ strident nationalism, which at first blush appears to be run-of-the-mill patriotic bombast, in reality spawned a perverse *völkisch* morality according to which

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<sup>36</sup> Hans Schwarz has characterised Althaus as an ‘innocent ally’ of the Nazi regime. See ‘Paul Althaus (1888–1966),’ *Lutheran Quarterly* 25:1 (2011): 28–51.

<sup>37</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Zu Gast auf einem schönen Stern: Erinnerungen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1984), 85.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, the memoirs of Wolfgang Trillhaas [*Aufgehobene Vergangenheit: Aus meinem Leben* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976)] and Walther von Loewenich [*Erlebte Theologie: Begegnungen, Erfahrungen, Erwägungen* (München: Claudius Verlag, 1979)], both former students of Althaus who became his colleagues on the Erlangen faculty.

<sup>39</sup> See Gutteridge, *Open Thy Mouth*, 274.

<sup>40</sup> See Hoover, ‘German Christian Nationalism,’ 312–13.

‘it is much easier for you to commit genocide with a clear conscience.’<sup>41</sup> Yet Gutteridge and Hoover seem to overstate the case: neither contemplates the indispensable prophetic function of Jewish persons (either as individuals or as a construct) in Althaus’ theology of the ‘Jewish Question.’ Genocide, as we shall see below, actually destroys Althaus’ vision for Jewish existence.

On the strength of his *Theologians Under Hitler*, American historian Robert Ericksen emerged as the most prominent and prolific Althaus commentator in the English-speaking world. Ericksen’s primary study locates Althaus as a mediator between two theologians—Gerhard Kittel (1888–1948) and Emanuel Hirsch (1888–1972)—with more pronounced National Socialist sympathies. This portrayal is consistent with the depiction of Althaus in Ericksen’s early work: a patriotic conservative who, despite his mediatory personality, lapsed into National Socialism and ‘limited antisemitism’ on account of his neo-conservatism and ‘parochial’ vision for Germany.<sup>42</sup> Ericksen sustains a negative judgment of Althaus over the course of subsequent publications. By the time we reach Ericksen’s mature work, Althaus appears as a *völkisch* theologian ‘eager to ride the Hitler bandwagon.’<sup>43</sup>

Ericksen understands Althaus’ antisemitism in generally cultural terms, arguing that although Althaus was influenced to some degree by racial theory, he supported National Socialist discrimination against Jews out of a ‘personal aversion’ for Jews and what they represented culturally.<sup>44</sup> ‘[Althaus] attacked Jews,’ says Ericksen, ‘primarily as the representatives of the Enlightenment, modernity, and

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>42</sup> Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler*, 115.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 118. However, in his early work Ericksen had already identified Althaus as an ‘accessory to Nazi crimes’ (‘The Political Theology of Paul Althaus,’ 566).

<sup>44</sup> Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler*, 108.



moral disintegration. That is to say, he stereotyped Jews as the main causes of all those changes in modern Germany which he most feared and disliked.’<sup>45</sup> While Ericksen’s socio-cultural hypothesis remains in force throughout his writings, he later argues that Althaus gradually came to accept the pseudo-scientific racial ideology of National Socialism more fully.<sup>46</sup>

Ericksen is right to identify the doctrine of the orders of creation, specifically the theology of the *Volk*, as the driving force behind Althaus’ views on the ‘Jewish Question.’ Ericksen’s Althaus is ‘a product of Christian theology, not [a] monstrosity created by the exigencies of the Nazi regime.’<sup>47</sup> That is to say, it was Althaus’ theology that prevented him from protesting the persecution of the Jews. Ericksen’s valuable account of Althaus as an ‘accessory to Nazi crimes’ has proven influential, but it does suffer deficiencies. The evidence indicates that Althaus never subscribed to racial theory to the degree Ericksen alleges. Moreover, while Ericksen does identify the ways in which Althaus uses the Jews as negative symbols, but he does not at all explore the Jews’ constructive and performative functions in his wider theological system. In short, Ericksen contributes to a limited and dichotomous paradigm of discourse by emphasising only the negative pole of Althaus’ dialectical theology of the ‘Jewish Question.’

American theologian Jack Forstman is also critical of Althaus, but has a clearer grasp on the dialectical nature of his theology. For Forstman, Althaus’ positive reception of National Socialism is not a result of unquestioned commitment

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Ericksen, ‘Emerging from the Legacy? Protestant Churches and the Shoah,’ *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 17:2 (2004), 374. Cf. Ericksen, ‘The Political Theology of Paul Althaus,’ 561.

<sup>46</sup> Ericksen, ‘Emerging from the Legacy?,’ 374–75. Ericksen elsewhere concludes that Althaus accepted the ‘racist ideal of the German *Volk*.’ See ‘Assessing the Heritage: German Protestant Theologians, Nazis, and the “Jewish Question,”’ in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, ed. Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 25.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, ‘The German Churches and the Holocaust,’ in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 299.

to the regime's ideology, but an equivocal theological method: 'We must not suppose that Althaus was a blindly ideological Nazi. . . . Barth employed the vigorous dialectic of Yes and No; Althaus used the more cautious dialectic of "on the one hand . . . on the other."' <sup>48</sup> As opposed to Barth, who had the vocabulary to flatly denounce Nazism, Althaus struggled to find a prophetic edge to his theology. Yet Forstman recognises the difficulty in casting moral judgments on these theologians who worked under Hitler's shadow. He writes, 'Looking back on the Third Reich, we have no problem with clarity . . . but we presume to our own peril that from the other side of 1933 everything was clear.' <sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, Althaus' story is one of failure; that he later recognised his error and fell silent is for Forstman 'a pathetically modest credit.' <sup>50</sup> With specific reference to the 'Jewish Question,' however, Forstman's depiction of the Althausian dialectic of 'Yes and No' should be qualified to reflect a more robust vision of inclusive quarantine.

Erlangen church historian Berndt Hamm likewise concludes that Althaus, along with his colleague Werner Elert, implicated himself in a web of complicity with the National Socialist regime. <sup>51</sup> Yet what is most problematic for Hamm is the form of discourse to which Althaus resorted to come to terms with the National Socialist past after the regime's collapse. In the context of post-*Shoah* discourse, Hamm distinguishes between the language of 'guilt' [*Schuld*], which implies moral agency and therefore responsibility, and the language of 'fate' [*Verhängnis*], which presupposes inescapable determinism that exempts the subject from moral

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<sup>48</sup> Forstman, *Christian Faith*, 198.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>51</sup> Berndt Hamm, 'Schuld und Verstrickung der Kirche: Vorüberlegungen zu einer Darstellung der Erlanger Theologie in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus,' in *Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992).

culpability.<sup>52</sup> By resorting to the language of *Verhängnis* in the post-*Shoah* period, Althaus divests German crimes of conscious agency and frames Christian guilt outside of ‘the sphere of perpetration and complicity, and characterises it as a passive omission [and thereby] trivialises it . . . through embedding it in the context of the unequally greater guilt of others . . .’<sup>53</sup> Althaus’ postwar sermons, according to Hamm, really serve an ‘exculpatory function’ as they allow ‘guilt to disappear behind an imposed destiny’:

The problem with the Althausian way of preaching, which has so much to say about the suffering of the German people and its Christians and so little to say about its perpetration [*Täterschaft*], lies not in that Althaus has no concept of the culpable entanglement [*schuldhaften Verstrickung*] that both his Erlangen hearers and he himself shared. . . . That Althaus denied the guilt of Christians and their church is not the problem, but rather *how* he speaks of it and how he deals with it . . .<sup>54</sup>

In this way, Althaus exhibits what Hamm has called the ‘syndrome of displacing one’s own fault’—a form of excuse-making *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that will never be able to come to terms with the past in a constructive way.<sup>55</sup>

Hamm argues that Althaus’ antisemitism is rooted deeply in his theology. Even though both Elert and Althaus ‘felt themselves free from any antisemitism,’ for each theologian ‘the blood-nature of race [*Blutsbeschaffenheit der Rasse*] is a fundamental component of national identity.’<sup>56</sup> In Hamm’s reading, blood, race, and nationhood form the starting point for Althaus’ theology of the Jews. His theology, anchored firmly in the *völkisch* tradition, grew so parochial that it blinded him to

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 13–14.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 17. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 16. Victoria Barnett has characterised this recollective strategy as the ‘*machtlos* phenomenon.’ See *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity during the Holocaust* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 18–19. Hamm’s comments have drawn heated criticism from former Erlangen University rector Gotthard Jasper, who sees Hamm’s interpretation of Althaus as typical of the naïve and overly-critical ‘68-ers’ generation. See Jasper, *Paul Althaus*, 385–86.

<sup>56</sup> Hamm, ‘Schuld und Verstrickung,’ 30.

anything other than the suffering of Germans, even in light of the cataclysm that the Nazi war machine had wrought on the Jews and the other peoples of Europe. In his postwar sermons, Althaus eulogises fallen German soldiers and mourns displaced German refugees but speaks not a word ‘about the millions of murdered Jews.’<sup>57</sup> For Hamm, then, Althaus’ theology alienated the Jews in life and denied them dignity in death. For all of its strengths, however, Hamm’s analysis does not account for the versatility of the Jews in Althaus’ theological system, in which the Jews fulfill a number of theological functions, some of them constructive. Hamm judges correctly that for Althaus the Jews represent a danger, but underestimates the integral role Jews play—beyond that of enemies—in Althaus’ theology.

In his study of socio-theological trends among conservative theologians and churchmen during the Weimar Republic, Roland Kurz considers Althaus’ work an archetypal expression of Protestant nationalism in the university context.<sup>58</sup> Like other scholars, Kurz sees the First World War, chiefly Althaus’ time in Poland, as the period during which his nationalist sympathies took root. It was during these years, long before his work as a university professor, that Althaus came to think of German history within the *Sonderweg* tradition, by which he interpreted the war as a holy crusade: Germany was struggling not only for its own greatness, but for the ‘blessing of the world.’<sup>59</sup> It was through this ideological commitment to German exceptionalism that Althaus came to further develop the concepts of the *Volksberuf* (‘ethno-national mission’) and the *Konfliktgesetz* (‘law of conflict’)—both of which would prove influential for his attitudes toward the Jews. However, Kurz does not

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 15–16.

<sup>58</sup> See Kurz, *Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 408–99.

<sup>59</sup> See *ibid.*, 422–26.

reckon fully with the ways in which Althaus brings his *völkisch* nationalism to bear on the ‘Jewish Question,’ as we will see below.

Kurz’s careful examination of the evolution of Althaus’ political ideas helps to make Althaus’ eventual decision to support National Socialism intelligible, if not defensible. The study’s key contribution, though, is its penetrating analysis of the eschatological dimension of Althaus’ *völkisch* outlook, which is especially clear in his early preaching. Althaus’ Łódź sermons reflect the ‘classical hope of nationalist Protestantism’: the German *Volk*, fortified by Luther and Lutheran Christianity, called to lead Europe in preparing the way of the Kingdom of God. ‘Because God wants to raise the German *Volk* up to be the leading nation in Europe,’ Kurz explains, ‘it must follow him dutifully and give everything for the *Vaterland*, the highest earthly good.’<sup>60</sup> This *völkisch* nationalism produced at least two critical outcomes: 1) Althaus demanded absolute obedience to the ordinances of creation, even though the questions of whether the *Volk*’s actions are just or whether there is hope of victory always remain unclear, and as a result 2) he ‘sacramentalised’ death for *Volk* and *Vaterland*, which, it seems to me, is something he did with violence generally. On account of these ‘misjudgments with catastrophic consequences,’ says Kurz, Althaus became an unwitting forerunner of Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels, whose invocation of ‘total war’ called for complete sacrifice for the war effort regardless of the cost.<sup>61</sup>

For these reasons Kurz condemns Althaus’ nationalist worldview as unchristian:

Althaus’ assessment of war is to be rejected decisively: the ‘God-willed hate’ for the enemy is a symbiosis between social Darwinism, eschatology, and a

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 477, 479.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 496–98.

doctrine of creation that goes beyond Christianity; a crusade mentality, which without doubt has been represented throughout the church's history, but nevertheless cannot be accepted as Christian because it stands in opposition to the concept of tolerance, among other things.<sup>62</sup>

Given that Kurz places Althaus' aggressive *völkisch* thought outside of the authentic Christian tradition, it is perhaps not surprising that he understands Althaus' antisemitic comments in largely socio-political terms. For Kurz, Althaus' hostility toward Jewish presence in Germany has no theological content: 'His antisemitism was the product of an anti-liberal worldview and not motivated by race or religious or Christian ideas: he wanted to combat individualism, the greatest danger for the concept of a homogenous national body [*Volkskörper*].'<sup>63</sup> Kurz is correct on that score, but he has only solved one-half of the equation: Althaus harboured a socio-political fear of Jews, of course, but he also considered Jews theologically significant. In this regard, his posture toward the 'Jewish Question' is profoundly theological and cannot be explained solely as cultural prejudice. In separating ideology from theology, which is a common strategy in the literature, Kurz has overlooked the performative function of the Jews in Althaus' imagination.

Tanja Hetzer has also identified the development of a racially motivated and anti-egalitarian political theology across Althaus' professional career. The progression began with his work as a military chaplain in Poland, where he first became acquainted with *völkisch* nationalism and where he first developed his 'blood-ideology' [*Blutsideologie*] out of a fear that ethnic Germans would be 'polonised.'<sup>64</sup> By combining this militaristic *völkisch* nationalism, animated by a

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 498.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 486.

<sup>64</sup> Tanja Hetzer, 'Deutsche Stunde': *Volksgemeinschaft und Antisemitismus in der politischen Theologie bei Paul Althaus* (München: Allitera Verlag, 2009), 48–57. Wolfgang Tilgner makes a similar argument in *Volksnomostheologie*, 180–82.

salvation-historical vision for the German *Volk*, with his doctrine of the orders of creation, ‘Althaus created a new foundation for antisemitism.’<sup>65</sup> Through his influence as a chief representative of the Protestant middle—those belonging neither to the *Bekennende Kirche* nor to the *Deutsche Christen*—Althaus contributed theological credibility to National Socialism during the *Kirchenkampf*. By this ‘ideological “road-paving” [*Straßenbau*] which prepared the way for Hitler . . . [Althaus endorsed] an ideology which reinforced obedience to the state and provided encouragement for an anti-egalitarian model of society.’<sup>66</sup> Like Kurz, Hetzer sees Althaus not as a misguided patriot, but as a Nazi herald.

Hetzer locates the roots of Althaus’ xenophobic nationalism in his experience with the *völkisch* movement in Poland, which had trained him to define national identity in terms of cultural and racial purity. Althaus’ *völkisch* theology, which is especially hostile in targeting foreign threats to the *Volk*, in turn rendered him susceptible to antisemitic rhetoric. As a result, he came to view the stereotypical Jew as a social and spiritual contagion—and a threat to the survival of the German people. Althaus’ new strain of antisemitism, argues Hetzer, is compounded by his ideological commitment to the supremacy of the state. As a result, when the National Socialist government levied disenfranchising legislation against the Jews, Althaus turned a blind eye.

Within this intellectual framework, says Hetzer, Althaus could not envision a solution to the ‘Jewish Question’ that would allow Germans and Jews to share the same public space—including the church. For this reason, Althaus not only approved

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<sup>65</sup> Hetzer, ‘*Deutsche Stunde*,’ 237–38.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 243. Cf. Tilgner, *Volksnomostheologie*, where Althaus is identified as an ‘unintentional forerunner’ [*Wegbereiter*] to National Socialist ideologies (88).

of political legislation against the Jews in the secular sphere, but he ultimately applied the ideology of the Aryan Paragraph in the ecclesiastical community as well.<sup>67</sup> The *Erlangen Opinion* thus represents a pastoral form of Althaus' racially motivated and prejudicial *Volk*-theology. In Hetzer's judgment, Althaus used this theology as a weapon to deprive Jews of their rights: 'He supplied a decisive contribution to the disenfranchisement of the Jews with his theological opinion on the introduction of the Aryan Paragraph into the ecclesiastical sphere. . .'.<sup>68</sup> As a representative of the church, Althaus provided theological ammunition in the war against the Jews and must be remembered as an opponent of human rights as a result.<sup>69</sup> Hetzer's analysis is broadly correct; however, the evidence suggests that Althaus did maintain a place for Jewish persons within German society, including its ecclesial spaces: the margins.

## B | SYMPATHY

With his article 'Die Theologie von Paul Althaus,' Marburg theologian Hans Grass aims to 'do justice to Althaus,' even while conceding that the events of the twentieth century have made it impossible to justify his political attitudes.<sup>70</sup> Even though he cannot apologise for Althaus totally, Grass does seek to rationalise his decisions. In particular, Althaus' heritage—his conservative upbringing, Lutheran training, and military service—made it 'very difficult' for him to resist National Socialism's early political platform.<sup>71</sup> Grass does recognise the dangerous possibilities of Althaus' *Uroffenbarungslehre*, for example, but is at pains to salvage

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 175–76, 243.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>70</sup> Hans Grass, 'Die Theologie von Paul Althaus,' *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 8 (1966), 228. Grass was a pupil and close spiritual confidant of Althaus. The two exchanged letters while Grass served as a soldier during the Second World War. See Jasper, *Paul Althaus*, 379–80.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 230.



his theology from the wreckage of his ‘temporary susceptibility to National Socialism.’<sup>72</sup> As part of this interpretive approach, Grass minimises Althaus’ militant writings as ‘embarrassments [*Peinlichkeiten*].’<sup>73</sup> However, to dismiss bellicose and xenophobic rhetoric—which manifested in the marginalisation of Jewish persons both in civil society and in the DEK—merely as an embarrassment is to obscure (and to excuse) a dangerous expression of Lutheran theology. In the end, though, Grass reverts to a strategy common to the narratives of sympathy. By warning against those who would ‘easily play the role of backward-facing prophets,’ Grass not only absolves Althaus, but exempts him from moral scrutiny altogether.<sup>74</sup>

Paul Knitter employs a similar interpretive technique in his article ‘Die Uroffenbarungslehre von Paul Althaus—Anknüpfungspunkt für den Nationalsozialismus?’ Here, Knitter seeks to untangle Althaus’ difficult legacy by reading his thought as a ‘solution’ [*Lösung*] of theology and ideology, which can be distilled into two separate component parts.<sup>75</sup> With this device, Knitter frames Althaus’ positive reception of National Socialism as a visceral reflex and not a theological decision. In this way, he attempts to extricate Althaus’ theology from his ideology, which he defines as a ‘primordial [*ursprüngliche*] . . . behavior and conviction which is in its nature and its origin above all socio-political and not theological.’<sup>76</sup> Within the logic of the argument, Althaus’ problematic political

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<sup>72</sup> In a 1978 article, Grass argues that Althaus’ doctrine does indeed have a mechanism for unmasking and resisting the demonic distortion of the orders of creation. What Grass does not account for, however, is why Althaus did not employ that mechanism. See Grass, ‘Althaus, Paul,’ in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978), 334. At any rate, Grass elsewhere concludes that by the early 1950s, Althaus had rehabilitated his jingoistic political theology.

<sup>73</sup> Grass, ‘Die Theologie von Paul Althaus,’ 231.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Knitter, ‘Die Uroffenbarungslehre von Paul Althaus—Anknüpfungspunkt für den Nationalsozialismus? Eine Studie zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Ideologie,’ *Evangelische Theologie* 33 (1973), 145.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 141. Knitter concludes that Althaus’ political attitudes come from a world that is ‘no longer comprehensible to us now’ (143).

commitments are attributed to his socio-cultural makeup in order to preserve his theology. It is worth noting here that Knitter has an interest in vindicating Althaus' *Uroffenbarungslehre*. The success of Knitter's wider theological project—ecumenical dialogue between Protestants and Roman Catholics regarding the world's religions—depends a great deal on the integrity of the concept of *Uroffenbarung*, which he believes to hold great promise for a Protestant approach to the non-Christian world.<sup>77</sup>

Knitter also applies this hypothesis to Althaus' comments on the 'Jewish Question,' which, he admits, are 'perhaps the gloomiest aspect of Althaus' "Yes" to the political revolution.'<sup>78</sup> Althaus' antisemitism, then, is really a residual cultural artefact, an instinct. In fact, according to Knitter, Althaus' explicit *theology* of the Jews works to mitigate against fanatical antisemitism, even while his *ideology* perpetuated anti-Jewish prejudices and stereotypes. Knitter flatly concludes that 'Althaus was against any form of antisemitism,' but provides little in the way of evidence for that claim, other than Althaus' recommendation that the German churches retain the Old Testament in worship.<sup>79</sup> Yet Knitter does not appear to have considered the ways in which Althaus, as I will illustrate below, uses the Old

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<sup>77</sup> See Knitter, *Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions*, especially chapters 1–2. Knitter, a Roman Catholic theologian, sees in Althaus the potential for a distinctly Protestant theology of the non-Christian world consonant with contemporary Catholic teaching (Vatican II). In particular, Knitter believes that *Uroffenbarung*, though not without its limitations, provides resources to negotiate a *via media* between two dominant but problematic approaches to non-Christian religions: the evolutionary relativism of Troeltsch and the *Religionsgeschichte Schule* and Barth's (nearly) universal rejection of human religion. For more on the same theme, see also Choi, *Das Konzept der Ur-Offenbarung*, especially 210–49. Like Knitter, Choi judges that Althaus' theology of non-Christian religions offers a middle way between the extremes pluralism and Barth's exclusivism. For Althaus, there is a 'dialectical tension between particularity in Jesus Christ and universality in God's working of grace' (249). For his part, Althaus continued to criticise Barth's theological project into the late 1950s, in part because he believed Barth's radical christocentrism could not account for the religious experience of the non-Christian world. See Althaus, "'Durch das Gesetz kommt Erkenntnis der Sünde': Zur Auseinandersetzung mit der exklusiv-christologischen Dogmatik," in *Solange es 'heute' heisst: Festgabe für Rudolf Hermann zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1957), 12–13.

<sup>78</sup> Knitter, 'Die Uroffenbarungslehre,' 149.

<sup>79</sup> See the footnote at *Ibid.*, 150. Knitter states that Althaus was not hostile toward Jewish people or Jewish religion, and thus dismisses his comments about the threat posed by Jews as a byproduct of his ideology.

Testament to denigrate Jews and Judaism. Ultimately, this is because his presuppositions about the origins of Althaus' attitudes toward the 'Jewish Question' cause him to misjudge the evidence. Knitter is unwilling to concede that there is any theological substance to Althaus' antisemitism that would require reconsideration in light of the *Shoah*. Instead, Althaus' hostility toward the Jews is minimised as one particularly 'embarrassing' feature of his ideological makeup.<sup>80</sup>

This artificial distinction between theology and ideology, however, is foreign to Althaus' thought, and for this reason has drawn criticism from other interpreters.<sup>81</sup> Althaus' writings indicate that his views of Jews and Judaism, while culturally influenced to be sure, are theologically grounded. In every instance, he confronts the 'Jewish Question' as an explicitly theological question and proposes an explicitly theological answer. Knitter's manufactured ideology/theology construct overlooks the critical function of the Jews in the logic of Althaus' theological system. Moreover, because Althaus' decisions are complex, I am skeptical about whether it is possible to disentangle ideology from theology—or from any other factor—based on the evidence. At any rate, Knitter's binary approach fails to reckon with Althaus' dialectical theology of Judaism, which resists dichotomous resolution.

In his detailed history of the Erlangen School, Karlmann Beyschlag champions Althaus as 'the last great Erlangen theologian.'<sup>82</sup> Beyschlag repurposes perhaps the most commonly criticised dimension of Althaus' theology—its

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 150. Accordingly, for Knitter the *Uroffenbarungslehre* is of course not a point of contact with National Socialist ideology. Cf. Grass, 'Die Theologie von Paul Althaus,' 231.

<sup>81</sup> See Forstman, *Christian Faith*, 250–251, and Roland Liebenberg, *Der Gott der Feldgrauen Männer: Die theozentrische Erfahrungstheologie von Paul Althaus d.J. im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2008), 502. Liebenberg: 'I have identified in [Althaus] no ideological assumption or political attitude that would not have been theologically motivated. . . . Althaus thought, spoke, and wrote from his subjective experience of God. It is here that he grounded his ideological view of the world and his political attitude' (502).

<sup>82</sup> Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie*, 183. Beyschlag is a former student of Althaus.

equivocating indecision and lack of critical prowess—as ‘theological versatility.’<sup>83</sup> However, it is Beyschlag’s historiographical method that is most striking: he diverts the discussion from Althaus the public theologian to Althaus the private individual. In fact, says Beyschlag, it is impossible to understand Althaus without having ‘personally experienced [his] spiritual charisma.’<sup>84</sup> However, by setting the parameters of the debate in this way, Beyschlag effectively disqualifies virtually all of Althaus’ critics from the discussion, and, in effect, exempts his own theological tradition from examination. ‘Karlmann Beyschlag,’ in the words of Tanja Hetzer, ‘is a representative of a generation of theologians who obviously want not only to guard their academic teacher Paul Althaus from any kind of criticism, but who also want to hear nothing about a critical historical reflection on his theology itself.’<sup>85</sup>

American theologian Lowell Green also seeks to preserve the integrity of Althaus’ theology in his two meticulously researched apologies for the Erlangen theology faculty during the National Socialist years.<sup>86</sup> The books are an answer to ‘intolerable denunciations by those living in an easy post-Hitler era who were scolding those who had done their best in dark and cloudy times.’<sup>87</sup> As a standing motif, Green is adamant that not one of the Erlangen theology faculty ever capitulated to National Socialist ideology. Yet the historical record forces Green to take creative positions to support that claim.<sup>88</sup> For example, Green argues that Elert

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 187–88. Beyschlag commends Althaus for the ‘courage to be a middle-man in the midst of a time of theological extremes and dissonances.’ For discussion of Althaus’ uncritical theological method, see Forstman, *Christian Faith*, 250–51 and Paul Hinlicky, *Before Auschwitz: What Christian Theology Must Learn from the Rise of Nazism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 177

<sup>84</sup> Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie*, 184.

<sup>85</sup> Hetzer, ‘*Deutsche Stunde*,’ 242.

<sup>86</sup> Lowell Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler: The Untold Story* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007) and Green, *The Erlangen School of Theology*.

<sup>87</sup> Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler*, 11. Green complains of ‘many slanderous charges’ against his Erlangen teachers in *The Erlangen School*, 9. Like Beyschlag, Green relies heavily on anecdotal recollections and testimony of his own personal experiences with Althaus and Elert.

<sup>88</sup> Green repeatedly claims that Erlangen’s was the only theological faculty in Germany to ‘avoid a Nazi takeover’ (*Lutherans Against Hitler*, 235). However, Tanja Hetzer, among others, disputes Green’s idyllic portrait

only pretended to be a Nazi in order to sabotage the regime's attempts to curtail academic freedom in the university.<sup>89</sup> In the end, Green acknowledges Althaus' public support for the nascent National Socialist government only with great reluctance, suggesting his endorsement was merely a benign misjudgment.<sup>90</sup>

Green's personal and confessional relationships to Althaus radically impact the way he approaches the evidence regarding Althaus' opinions about the 'Jewish Question.' Green routinely interprets texts—many of which appear self-evidently antisemitic—in such a way as to exonerate his mentor.<sup>91</sup> This overarching assumption dictates Green's exegesis: 'To be sure, Althaus acknowledged, the church must acknowledge the existence of a "Jewish Problem," or even of a "Jewish Threat." But this dare never lead to Antisemitism [*sic*]. . . . At no time did Althaus manifest so-called Jew hatred.'<sup>92</sup> Althaus' hostile attack on the corrosive spirit of 'Judaism' in his Weimar writings, for instance, is considered a perfectly defensible example of a purely theological anti-Judaism. On this basis, Green defends the *Erlangen Opinion*, whose positive response to the Aryan Paragraph should be excused because its authors, 'writing on September 25, 1933, were without a clue regarding the dreadful racism that was about to break out in Germany.'<sup>93</sup>

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of Erlangen: 'Erlangen was the first stronghold of the National Socialist Students-Association, which the university leadership by no means restrained.' Hetzer also describes a public burning of books by Jewish, Marxist, and pacifist authors put on by National Socialist students at Erlangen ('*Deutsche Stunde*,' 166–68, 240). This report is corroborated by Jasper in 'Die Friedrich-Alexander-Universität,' 264. Tim Grady also notes that Erlangen was the first university to appoint a National Socialist student council in 1929 and that, after this, 'antisemitism became an open, acknowledged facet of university life in Erlangen.' See 'Academic Antisemitism: The Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen and the Jews,' *History Today* 52:7 (2002): 48–53. This behavior appears consistent with the 'disorders' organised by the student associations of many universities across Germany after the Nazi seizure of power. See Edward Hartshorne, *The German Universities and National Socialism* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1937), 55–57.

<sup>89</sup> Green, *The Erlangen School*, 238.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 273–77.

<sup>91</sup> Green studied for his doctorate first under the supervision of Werner Elert and later under Althaus.

<sup>92</sup> Green, *The Erlangen School*, 272.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 134. This claim is open to challenge on purely historical grounds, but it is also inconsistent with Green's prior assertion that Althaus was one of the 'Lutheran writers [to] voice early warnings about the coming racism' (*Lutherans Against Hitler*, 116).

Though it has met with harsh criticism,<sup>94</sup> Green's analysis succeeds insofar as it complicates the dominant narrative that rests on an uncritical presumption that Althaus was simply a Nazi theologian. Green does call into question a prevailing assumption in English-speaking Althaus scholarship that is on the verge of cliché. Yet his intractable commitment to confessional Lutheranism (and personal loyalty to Althaus) forces him to contort the evidence in support of conclusions that test the limits of credibility. There is indeed room for dissenting interpretations of Althaus' ambivalent legacy, but the historical record simply cannot support Green's claim that Althaus and the Erlangen faculty led the German churches in the struggle against National Socialism.<sup>95</sup>

Lutheran theologian Hans Schwarz, another of Althaus' students, confronts the suspicion surrounding Althaus' theology since his collusion with National Socialism, asking rhetorically, 'What is so fatal in Althaus' theology and what tainted his reputation?'<sup>96</sup> Schwarz judges that Althaus' theology has been pulled out of shape by overly-critical historiography. In the turbulent days of the 1920s and 1930s, suggests Schwarz, Althaus was merely trying to navigate between the fanatical *Deutsche Christen* on one side and the deficient theology of Karl Barth on the other.<sup>97</sup> Thus it follows that the *Ansbach Memorandum's* criticism of the *Barmen Declaration*, to which we will turn in due course, is a matter of confessional precision, not an expression of uncritical support for National Socialism.

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<sup>94</sup> Lutheran theologian Paul Hinlicky describes Green's work as 'partisanship posing as history [which] betrays the worst conceits of self-exculpating, wagon-circling apologetics' (*Before Auschwitz*, 52–64).

<sup>95</sup> See Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler*, 234.

<sup>96</sup> Hans Schwarz, 'Paul Althaus (1888–1966),' in *Twentieth-Century Lutheran Theologians*, ed. Mark Mattes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 142. This chapter is a slightly modified duplication of Schwarz's earlier article, already mentioned: Hans Schwarz, 'Paul Althaus (1888–1966),' *Lutheran Quarterly* 25:1 (2011): 28–51. Schwarz complains that '[e]very now and then Althaus is still blamed for having provided theological support for the Nazi cause' (147).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 145–46.

In the same way, Schwarz situates Althaus' antisemitic statements within the popular anti-Judaic rhetoric of the age; in this context, his theology appears moderate because it is not motivated by racial animus.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, Schwarz does criticise the elements of Althaus' political history that are clearly problematic, but he also stresses the difficulty of making moral judgments about Althaus' ambivalent legacy. He captures that tension in his memorable characterisation of Althaus as an 'innocent ally' of the National Socialist regime.<sup>99</sup> The phrase portrays Althaus as both a perpetrator and a victim, betrayed by his own naïve misuse of legitimate Lutheran doctrines. For Schwarz, the final word on Althaus is not one of guilt but one of tragedy. Nathan Howard Yoder, a recent student of Schwarz's, has come to similar conclusions, though there is a case to be made that his account belongs within the narratives of ambivalence. Yoder's reading of Althaus is broadly sympathetic, however, as it is part of a wider attempt to rehabilitate the Erlangen School's much-maligned orders of creation tradition. And while Yoder does flatly condemn the 'ideological' elements that invaded Althausian theology, he also minimises Althaus' antisemitic rhetoric as an 'unfortunate association.'<sup>100</sup>

Erlangen political scientist Gotthard Jasper's magisterial *Paul Althaus (1888–1966): Professor, Prediger und Patriot in seiner Zeit* is the most comprehensive study of Althaus to date. Though he devotes most of the biography to other topics, Jasper is of course aware of the controversy surrounding Althaus' political views, especially in the years immediately before the Nazi seizure of power. However, he

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 147. Choi likewise names Althaus as one of many 'victims' of a 'church-historical misunderstanding' regarding Protestant attitudes toward Hitler. See *Das Konzept der Ur-Offenbarung*, 18–19.

<sup>100</sup> See Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, chapter 2 (especially 100–05). Yoder's account is carefully researched and persuasive; there are significant deficiencies in its handling of Althaus' anti-Jewish materials, however, as it does not even mention the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph*.

contends that Althaus' militant comments in the late Weimar era have been grossly misunderstood because they have been torn from the context to which they were originally speaking.<sup>101</sup> In fact, says Jasper, Althaus developed his christianised nationalism to offer patriotic Germans a moderate alternative to the *Deutsche Christen* movement that still affirmed the validity of the authoritarian state without degenerating into radicalism.<sup>102</sup> His nationalistic writings of the early 1930s, therefore, must be read not as an unqualified endorsement of the new state, but as an attempt to win over 'the silent majority of the *Deutsche Christen*' to his moderate *völkisch* position.<sup>103</sup>

Though Jasper does acknowledge Althaus' temporary public support for the National Socialist government, he attributes that decision to the influence of his conservative socio-cultural makeup. Jasper's Althaus is motivated above all by a romanticised vision for a Christian *Volk*, so he did indeed hope—albeit 'all too gullibly'—for a new beginning for Germany in 1933, but not any more than another conservative Protestant with a similar background would have.<sup>104</sup> He believed the National Socialist government promised order and stability and a renewal of Christian values. In the end, Jasper laments that 'moralising and accusatory' historiography have overlooked these complex factors.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> See Jasper, *Paul Althaus*, 225. For further comment on Althaus and Elert, see also Jasper, 'Die Friedrich-Alexander-Universität,' 258–68.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 233–38.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 388. In Jasper's telling of Althaus' career narrative, as Allied occupation forces descended on Erlangen in the spring of 1945, Althaus was to endure a series of mischaracterisations. First, Althaus was betrayed by Hermann Sasse, professor of theology at Erlangen, who had been commissioned by the Allied denazification authorities to prepare a confidential memorandum concerning the conduct of the Erlangen theology faculty during the Nazi government and the years immediately preceding it. Sasse's description of Althaus was unflattering, suggesting that Althaus' teaching on the *Volk* had contributed to the church's capitulation to National Socialist ideology. Jasper considers Sasse's treatment of Althaus to be motivated by 'intra-faculty power plays' (323f). Next, the *Berliner Zeitung* slandered Althaus in a 'false report' on 8 August 1946, which described Althaus as 'an old German-Nationalist' who 'was even temporarily a German Christian.' Jasper argues that Althaus had established himself as a clear opponent of the *Deutsche Christen* by 1933 (327). Finally, Althaus has been maligned by his critics, who have created a 'one-sided' view of Althaus in the years since (385–88).



Jasper also knows that Althaus harboured an attitude toward Jews that appears unacceptable today, but again insists that he inherited that attitude from his culture: ‘His environment afforded him only an abstract, prejudicial, quasi-portrait of “typical Jews” and of “typical Jewish character” as a foil to hold opposite the ideal of “Germanness.”’<sup>106</sup> It follows that Althaus’ mild antisemitism was not the result of a deliberate theological logic, but was instead merely a residual provincialism that could have been obviated had he been raised in a more cosmopolitan environment. Had Althaus accepted a call to Berlin in 1929, for example, his view of Judaism would have been expanded by encounters with ‘numerous distinguished colleagues and other faculty, who would have dismantled his abstract, negative picture of the Jew.’<sup>107</sup> In support of his interpretation, Jasper points correctly to the fact that Althaus did not define German national character primarily by race or blood, but by cultural and historical determination, leaving open the hypothetical possibility that Jews could truly be German.<sup>108</sup>

On the whole, though, Jasper minimises Althaus’ antisemitic attitudes by explaining them away as a residual provincial prejudice, thereby extracting them from the substance of Althaus’ theology. At no point does Jasper fully reckon with the pathological dimension of the Althaus’ dialectical theology of the ‘Jews.’ On the contrary, Jasper’s Althaus should be remembered for his ‘opposition against the ideological dictatorship of National Socialist rule, against the persecution of the Jews, and against National Socialist church politics.’<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 329–330. Jasper’s conclusion here is difficult to square with his earlier admission that the brutal tactics of National Socialism during the early 1930s—including persecution of communists and social democrats, the anti-Jewish boycott, the burning of books, and the murder of Jewish-German economist (and Erlangen graduate) Rudolf Benario in Dachau—were public knowledge in Erlangen but passed by without protest, ‘even from the theologians’ (‘Die Friedrich-Alexander-Universität,’ 268).

In recent years, two studies have emerged—Roland Liebenberg’s *Der Gott der Feldgrauen Männer* and André Fischer’s *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*<sup>110</sup>—which do not conform to the suspicion/sympathy dichotomy. Neither piece is much interested in making moral judgments about Althaus’ political decisions. Instead, the studies are descriptive, with each scholar searching Althaus’ past for clues into his eventual affirmation of the National Socialist government. Liebenberg discerns the formation of a militaristic *völkisch* theology during Althaus’ years as a chaplain in Poland, roughly 1915–1918, before he made any public comment on the ‘Jewish Question.’<sup>111</sup> Fischer looks to the turbulent years of the Weimar Republic as the period in which Althaus’ political theology began to take shape.

Fischer concludes that Althaus’ political thought is characterised above all by ‘ambivalence.’<sup>112</sup> His attitudes, therefore, are not easily categorised because a cautious ‘Yes-But dialectic’ [*Ja-aber-Dialektik*], with which he could accept some elements of Nazi ideology while rejecting others, governs his political and theological judgments. Because Althaus’ relationship to National Socialism is complicated and fragile, Fischer finds it more appropriate to speak of ‘factors of susceptibility to National Socialism’ and ‘factors of resistance to National Socialism.’<sup>113</sup> Whereas Althaus was initially attracted to the regime for reasons not

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<sup>110</sup> Roland Liebenberg, *Der Gott der Feldgrauen Männer* (2008) and André Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist: Die politische Theologie von Paul Althaus in der Weimarer Republik*, *Arbeiten zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte* B:55 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

<sup>111</sup> Liebenberg employs a sociological method to untangle the ‘relevant factors’ contributing to Althaus’ political attitudes apart from his theological commitments, including his ‘biographical background, his intellectual disposition, his ideological influences, and his social environment.’ See *Der Gott der Feldgrauen Männer*, 16–17, 504. Liebenberg’s study does not address Althaus’ perspectives on the ‘Jewish Question.’

<sup>112</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 453, *passim*.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 682–92.

explicitly theological, Fischer sees the ‘factors of resistance’ as anchored primarily in his Christian faith. In particular, says Fischer, Althaus’ theology of the orders of creation precluded ethnic autarchy and crass biological antisemitism.<sup>114</sup> Ultimately, however, with his *völkisch* impulses in tension with his commitment to the church’s proclamation, Althaus was caught tragically between *Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, that is, between his witness as a Christian theologian and his enthusiasm for the spirit of the times.<sup>115</sup>

Likewise, Fischer argues that Althaus’ relationship to Jews and Judaism is complicated—exhibiting both positive and negative dimensions—and cannot therefore be reduced to straightforward prejudice or hatred.<sup>116</sup> Fischer runs up against the difficulties posed by Althaus’ ambivalence about the Jews, but nonetheless perceives that Jewish existence continues to fulfill a critical purpose in his thought. In Althaus’ theology, as Fischer puts it, the Jews retain an ‘indirect eschatological significance’ as signs of the coming Kingdom of God who disrupt the ethnic homogeneity of human communities.<sup>117</sup> Yet Althaus’ posture toward Jews and Judaism struggles with an unresolved—and perhaps unresolvable—tension between fear of and fascination with Judaism.<sup>118</sup>

Though he no doubt fretted over the social and cultural influence that Jews exercised in public life, Althaus, as Fischer rightly notes, thought of the ‘Jewish Question’ primarily in theological (and not in racial) terms.<sup>119</sup> Fischer stresses that

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 698–99. For reasons that will become clear throughout the thesis, I am not convinced by Fischer’s reading of Althaus’ doctrine of the orders of creation.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 708.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 486–91.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 500–02.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 534–35. Stephen Haynes has reached a similar conclusion in *Reluctant Witnesses*, 87–89. Compare also Christopher Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 32–37.

<sup>119</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 512.

Althaus refused to characterise Jews as a biologically inferior race and never envisioned a Germany without Jews.<sup>120</sup> At the same time, he shows that Althaus' publications regarding the 'Jewish Question' beginning in the late 1920s do indicate a susceptibility to 'antisemitic ideology of the primitive type.'<sup>121</sup> These texts are rife with deep-seated prejudices that border on the racial stereotyping. Fischer's study succeeds in connecting Althaus' perspectives on the 'Jewish Question' to his wider theology of the *Volk* and in fleshing out the nuances of Althaus' theology of Judaism.

In the end, though, Fischer credits Althaus with an antisemitism that is 'spiritual-cultural-moral' [*geistig-kulturell-sittlichen*] in character, which Fischer judges as a moral improvement over the crass racial antisemitism of the era. However, it not clear exactly why spiritual antisemitism is morally superior to racial antisemitism—if the two can be separated at all. Indeed, whatever the basis of their exclusion—cultural or racial—Althaus identified the Jews as dangerous elements on the fringes of society. In particular, Fischer's claim that Althaus did not hold a 'dualistic worldview' in which Jews are associated with evil in an unsophisticated way needs to be further qualified.<sup>122</sup> Though I argue below that Fischer's analysis does not exhaust all of the dimensions of Althaus' relationship to the 'Jewish Question,' he is surely right that it is difficult to classify Althaus' peculiar breed of antisemitism.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 517, 532.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 494–95.

<sup>122</sup> See *ibid.*, 532–33.

<sup>123</sup> Fischer notes at various places that Althaus' views on the 'Jewish Question' are an 'original approach [*eigenständigen Ansatz*].' See *ibid.*, 521, 536.

## METHOD, SCOPE, AND STRUCTURE

### A | A DIALECTICAL APPROACH

As we have seen, scholarly judgments about Althaus' relationship to Jews and Judaism typically conform to the larger narratives within which they are embedded. Almost all his interpreters, critics and apologists alike, agree that Althaus is no philosemite, but they disagree about the character and substance of his antisemitism—if it is appropriate to speak of his 'antisemitism' at all. Questions also remain as to whether this antisemitism is rooted deeply in his theology or an accidental by-product of his socio-cultural inheritance. Indeed, because of the peculiarity of Althaus' posture toward the 'Jewish Question,' this study encounters the same obstacle raised by Fischer: it is difficult to categorise Althaus' antisemitism.

I offer here a brief word of explanation about my use of the term 'antisemitism' in the thesis. Although I find the theoretical distinction between theological anti-Judaism and racial or ethnic antisemitism to be dubious, Althaus does (more or less) attempt to establish an ostensible distinction between the theological and the socio-political dimensions of the 'Jewish Question.' However, as he comments on the issue more extensively across his career, it becomes more and more difficult for him to maintain this distinction. As a result, in many cases the line between anti-Judaism and antisemitism (if there is such a line) is blurred. So, in the end, I doubt whether it is possible to dissociate ideology from theology, though this is a common approach in dissecting the rhetoric of the age. For instance, in her study of Protestant attitudes toward the 'Jewish Question' at the end of the Weimar Republic, Marikje Smid differentiates between *Antijudaismus* (polemic motivated solely by religious concerns), *Judenfeindschaft* (an ancient and nondescript social animosity toward Jews), and *Antisemitismus* (a distinctly modern expression of Jew-

hatred resting on a racial-biological worldview).<sup>124</sup> While such a schema is perhaps hypothetically viable, the difficulty is that, at least in Althaus, there is no clear separation of the three categories: socio-cultural prejudices are tangled up with racial stereotypes, both of which Althaus interprets theologically.

In order to diagnose the problematic elements of Althaus' views on Jews and Judaism, then, I am making use of Gavin Langmuir's paradigm, which categorises antisemitism as rhetoric resting on 'chimerical assertions' against Jews that have no basis in reality and are not empirically verifiable.<sup>125</sup> Langmuir's approach, to my mind, is most useful because it can be expanded also to include ideological or theological misrepresentations of Jews or Jewish practice. In this regard, Christian caricatures of Jews also qualify as chimerical when they perpetuate an image of Judaism that does not conform to Jewish self-understanding, does not draw on Jewish texts or traditions, and does not correspond to the reality of Judaism as a living religion.<sup>126</sup>

As will become evident throughout the study, Althaus—even when making a self-conscious effort to engage Judaism on theological terms—often lapses into 'chimerical' discourse. For example, in his expositions of 'Judaism' he virtually never consults Jewish sources for his analysis. It is not always immediately clear, moreover, whether he is making reference to living Jewish persons when he speaks of 'Jews.' 'The Jew' is often objectified or instrumentalised to function as a device with a wide range of rhetorical purposes. The matter is further complicated by

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<sup>124</sup> See Part I of Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus*, summarised at 199–200.

<sup>125</sup> See Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 330–34.

<sup>126</sup> Charlotte Klein has illustrated how, time and again, Christian theologians reject a Judaism that is merely a product of their own devising. See *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology*, trans. Edward Quinn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

Althaus' tendency to use terms like 'Jew' or 'Israel' somewhat indiscriminately, though it is generally true that he considers 'Israel' to have become 'the Jews' at the crucifixion. As is still the case in much Protestant theology after the Holocaust, Althaus sometimes conflates 'Jews' and 'Israel' without nuance or regard for historical context.<sup>127</sup>

Do Althaus' comments about Jews and Judaism have an explicit theological content or do they derive from an ideological source? Does Althaus prescribe the inclusion or the exclusion of Jewish persons with respect to German society? Posed in false binary, these questions obscure more than they reveal. The logic driving Althaus' attitudes toward the Jews is, in my view, synthetic. That is to say, it incorporates Althaus' socio-cultural (i.e., ideological) fear of the Jews within his unique permutation of the doctrine of the orders of creation. But his theology of the 'Jewish Question' is above all dialectical: Althaus thus forms a system in which Jews are *necessary enemies*—simultaneously a danger to the German *Volk* and an indispensable factor in a healthy theology of the German *Volk*. For this reason, scholarly approaches that divorce ideology and theology, as if the two could be separated cleanly, invite misinterpretation of Althaus' theology of the 'Jewish Question.'<sup>128</sup>

As I have shown here, the state of research could benefit from additional investigation into this question. As Joo-Hoon Choi has observed, and as my survey has confirmed, the scholarly discussion surrounding Althaus has often crystalised

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<sup>127</sup> According to K. Hannah Holtschneider, this tendency characterises much speech about the Jewish people in the Christian tradition. See *German Protestants Remember the Holocaust: Theology and the Construction of Collective Memory*, Religion-Geschichte-Gesellschaft Fundamentaltheologische Studien 24 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2001), 38.

<sup>128</sup> See, for instance, *Martin Luther*, where Stayer suggests that 'When Althaus wrote about the "Jewish question" in 1929, it was a theologian, not as a nationalist' (91). However, I see no reason to separate the two: Althaus incorporated his nationalist loyalties within his theology of the *Volk*.

into narratives that either ‘generalise, simplify, or glorify.’<sup>129</sup> For all of the valuable insight it has provided, then, the hitherto-existing literature has only begun to reckon with the theological imagination behind Althaus’ answer to the ‘Jewish Question.’ The narratives of suspicion run the risk of overstating his commitment to racial ideology and too often fail to recognise the constructive and performative functions of the Jews in Althaus’ theology. The narratives of sympathy, by explaining Althaus’ antisemitism as an ideological reflex or a cultural artefact, divest his opinions on the ‘Jewish Question’ of the theological content with which Althaus himself intentionally infused them. In so doing, these narratives also overlook the integral role the Jews play in his doctrine of the orders of creation. In a sense, both narratives are correct, but Althaus’ dialectical approach actually occupies the space between them. As I argue through the thesis, Althaus’ vision of inclusive quarantine represents a unique iteration of Christian antisemitism: the simultaneous attempt to include Jewish persons within and exclude them from the *Völker* around them.

## B | A CHRONOLOGICAL APPROACH

This thesis is intended neither as another history of the *Kirchenkampf* nor as a work of Christian Holocaust Theology; there is a vast supply of literature on those subjects to which I can make little contribution.<sup>130</sup> For this reason, the study is not

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<sup>129</sup> Choi, *Das Konzept der Ur-Offenbarung*, 18–19.

<sup>130</sup> The standard treatment of the *Kirchenkampf* and its prehistory remains Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich, Volume I: Preliminary History and the Time of Illusions, 1918–1934* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988). Important introductions in English also include: Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992); John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933–1945* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1968); and Peter Matheson, *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981). See also 105–09 on the *Kirchenkampf* below. For notable works in Christian Holocaust theology, see Alice Eckardt and A. Roy Eckardt, *Long Night’s Journey into Day: A Revised Retrospective on the Holocaust*, revised edition (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1988); Stephen Haynes, *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology: ‘Israel’ in the Theologies of Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, and Paul Van Buren*, American Academy of Religion Series 77 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991); Franklin Little, *The Crucifixion of the Jews: The Failure of Christians to Understand the Jewish Experience* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995); and Paul Van Buren, *A Theology of Jewish Christian Reality* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987).



organised thematically. Instead, what I offer here is a systematic chronological exegesis of Althaus' theology of Jews and Judaism as it came to expression across his public lectures, works of academic theology, biblical studies, and ethics, as well as essays of social commentary, sermons, and archival material. My reading of Althaus is canonical, so to speak—that is to say, I use documents from a similar timeframe to inform and interpret others. In this way, for example, the thesis illuminates the complex strand of Christian antisemitism behind the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph* by drawing on Althaus' comments on the 'Jewish Question' found elsewhere in his corpus.

The thesis is structured according to chronology: I trace the development of the discursive categories Althaus used to interpret the meaning of Jewish existence over three periods: the Weimar Republic (1918 to early 1933), the National Socialist regime (1933–1945), and denazification and the Federal Republic of Germany (1945 to Althaus' death in 1966). Although Althaus only addressed the 'Jewish Question' as such in four texts before the Nazi *Machtergreifung*, the Jews would continue to function as important symbols in his theology of the *Volk* through to the end of his life. This chronological approach will elucidate whether and how the ways in which he interpreted Jewish existence changed over the course of his professional career, particularly in light of the increasing disenfranchisement of Jewish persons, which began in the early 1930s and culminated in their catastrophic genocide in the *Shoah*. I sketch the trajectory of the dissertation below.

The argument of the thesis proceeds along four movements. In the first movement, I uncover the rudiments of Althaus' theology of the 'Jewish Question,' which he formulates for the first time toward the end of the Weimar Republic. Chapter two surveys two key publications from the era—*Kirche und Volkstum*

(1927) and *Leitsätze zur Ethik* (1929)—to establish the *pathological* pole of the dialectic. Here, Althaus targets Jews as pathogens who bear a spiritual sickness that threatens to infect German *Volkstum*. At the same time, however, he begins to lay out the (quasi-)inclusive social model that would come to structure his thinking about the place of Jews in civil and ecclesial communities. Chapter three turns to works composed just before the Nazi revolution: *Gott und Volk* (1932) and *Der Brief an die Römer* (1932). In these pieces, Althaus builds on his earlier work toward a more robust vision of Jewish *performance*—i.e., the mysterious theological function of Jewish existence. These chapters, taken together, establish the contours of Althaus’ proposed solution to the ‘Jewish Question’ as it developed within his doctrine of the orders of creation during the Weimar era: inclusive quarantine. It is during this period, moreover, that Althaus first hints at a paradoxical link between the Jewish and German destinies. This link, by which he can sometimes make an explicit identification of German and Jewish experience, would play a central role in his understanding of the ongoing significance of Judaism, especially in the postwar period.

The second movement uses the interpretive grid of inclusive quarantine to draw out critical nuances of two theological declarations co-authored by Althaus in the early years of National Socialism’s administration: the *Theologisches Gutachten über die Zulassung von Christen jüdischer Herkunft zu den Ämtern der deutschen evangelischen Kirche* (25 September 1933) and the *Ansbacher Ratschlag zu der Barmer theologischen Erklärung* (11 June 1934). These nuances are difficult to discern without a broader knowledge of Althaus’ dialectical approach to the ‘Jewish Question.’ In particular, chapter four argues that both documents reflect a formulation of the doctrine of the orders of creation in which the church (and the

organisation of civil society) is subordinated to the *Volk* to produce a xenophobic, and therefore deficient, political theology and ecclesiology. In chapter five, I then suggest that the *Erlangen Opinion* represents Althaus' broader theological vision for Jewish existence in microcosm: Christians of Jewish descent (as well as Jewish scripture), though vital for both Christian and German self-understanding, must be quarantined even within the church.

The third movement examines the evolution of Althaus' posture toward Jews and Judaism in the years following the *Shoah*. In this section, I conclude that, even in light of the inhuman crimes against the Jews, Althaus came to relinquish the dialectic of pathology and performance only gradually and partially. Thus Althaus' mature theology of the 'Jewish Question' is characterised by both continuity and discontinuity. On the one hand, as I argue in chapter six, 'Jews' continue to perform vital pastoral functions for the ruined German *Volk*—that is, Althaus uses the story of Israel (but perhaps not living Jewish persons themselves) to interpret the experience of German suffering and guilt. In his academic works of biblical exegesis and theological ethics, on the other hand, Althaus appears to make a conscious effort to reform his prior views on the *Volk* and the state following the genocide of Europe's Jews. However, as I suggest in chapter seven, this attempt is abortive because he had always connected pathology and performance so closely. In short, if Althaus cannot speak of Jews as pathological he cannot really speak of Jews at all.

The project's fourth movement approaches Althaus as a case study in the viability of Lutheran social ethics. His singular adaptation of the Lutheran *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*, with which he classified the world's peoples according to an ethnic taxonomy, had produced both an ecclesiology and a social ethics unable to cope with the moral pressures of the Third Reich. As a result, some critics, chiefly

Karl Barth, have pointed to the doctrine—and Althaus’ particularly xenophobic version—as proof of a fatal flaw in Lutheran ethics.

Chapters eight and nine, therefore, address broader questions of Lutheran dogmatics. In chapter eight, I suggest that Althaus constructed his paradigm of inclusive quarantine, along with its problematic implications for ecclesiology, against his better judgment. In chapter nine, I show that there are resources for repair within Althaus’ own Lutheran tradition, looking to his contemporaries Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rudolf Bultmann, and Hermann Sasse for materials with which to build a more genuinely inclusive socio-ecclesial theology. These chapters are critical if we are to apply this study of Althaus to larger issues in Christian theology. Indeed, for Althaus the ‘Jewish Question’ was always an ecclesial question to be approached in view of its explicit contemporary significance for the church.<sup>131</sup> The *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph* (which lies at the heart of the thesis) was, after all, the product of deliberation about what the church is and who belongs in it. If there are lessons to be learned from Althaus’ story going forward, we must start here: at the intersection of creation and church, both of which were connected closely with the meaning of the Jews in his theological imagination.

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<sup>131</sup> See Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus*, 282–83.

MOVEMENT I: THE VOLK WHO BELONG EVERYWHERE AND NOWHERE: ALTHAUS' SOCIETAL VISION FOR THE JEWS DURING THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC (1919–1933)

**SECTION I INTRODUCTION | INCLUSIVE QUARANTINE AND THE DIALECTIC OF PATHOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE**

In Althaus' writings of the Weimar era, the Jews play a critical yet precarious role. Appearing as the simultaneously elect and cursed people of God, the Jews are condemned to wander on the margins of all human societies as living signs of God's judgment and as irritants that prevent the achievement of the total ethnic homogeneity of other peoples. They are portrayed, moreover, as powerful and dangerous foils against which Germans struggle to fulfill their own destiny and to protect their society against spiritual sickness. In each case, Althaus confronts the 'Jewish Question' within the context of his singularly aggressive strain of the Lutheran doctrine of the orders of creation, which Karl Barth once vilified as 'the most evil of all theological doctrines.'<sup>1</sup>

In the section to follow we examine Althaus' attitudes toward Jews and Judaism as they developed toward the final years of the Weimar Republic, the first point at which he addressed himself explicitly to the 'Jewish Question.' In chapter two we uncover Althaus' paradoxical paradigm for approaching the issue of Jewish communities in Germany, with specific reference to a pair of publications from the late 1920s: *Kirche und Volkstum* (1927) and *Leitsätze zur Ethik* (1929). There is no doubt that during this period Althaus, not unlike many of his contemporaries, perceived the Jews as a danger to German *Volkstum*. However, he rejected both the Enlightenment project of emancipation–assimilation and the demand for the

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, 'Basic Problems of Christian Social Ethics: A Discussion with Paul Althaus,' in *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, vol. 2, ed. James Robinson, trans. Keith Crim (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968), 48.

expulsion of Jews from Germany motivated by crude racial antisemitism. Instead, Althaus envisions Germans and Jews as occupying the same societal space, though clearly (and visibly) delineated from one another. Chapter three aims to investigate the mysterious theological purpose of Jewish existence as imagined by Althaus on the eve of the ‘great turning point’ of the National Socialist rise to power. In two publications from the final year of the Weimar Republic, *Gott und Volk* (1932) and *Der Brief an die Römer* (1932), Althaus suggests that Jews, despite the dangers they pose, perform vital theological functions and thus are a critical component to a correct theological understanding of the German identity. To anticipate: during this period Althaus begins to develop his controlling vision of *inclusive quarantine*, according to which Jewish existence is both pathological and performative.

## **CHAPTER II | INVISIBLE OTHERS: THE ‘JEWISH QUESTION’ IN THE ALTHAUSIAN IMAGINATION**

We sense the *Volk*’s enemies in its midst, people who speak its language and eat its bread but are nevertheless its corruptors.

Paul Althaus, ‘Das Vaterland’ (1929)

### **INTRODUCTION**

Althaus regarded the Weimar Republic with a thoroughgoing mistrust. Not only did the democracy represent a style of government he considered incompatible with the German spirit, Weimar also symbolised secularism and moral degeneration. In 1927’s *Kirche und Volkstum*, Althaus targeted the Jews as the prime representatives of this secular ideology so corrosive to the German soul. ‘The Jews’ serve as a rhetorical construct by which Althaus expresses his anxiety over modernity. His fear and suspicion of an emancipated and assimilated Jewry is also evident in his *Leitsätze zur Ethik* of 1929, wherein he called for a strict and visible demarcation between Germans and Jews within a shared societal space. What emerges from these two treatises is a proposal for the place of Jews in civic life that conforms to neither the Enlightenment project of emancipation–assimilation nor to the radical demand for the expulsion of Germany’s Jews. Here we discern the beginnings of the dialectic of pathology and performance, an interpretive matrix that would govern Althaus’ theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ until the end of his career and would ultimately yield a socio-theological prescription for inclusive quarantine.

### **ONE | ALTHAUS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC**

Like many men of his generation, Althaus felt his life-course altered drastically by the outbreak of the First World War. Raptured with what Tanja Hetzer has called ‘war-euphoria,’ he was eager to join in the war effort, to which he ascribed

a religious significance.<sup>2</sup> However, he was disqualified from conventional military service for health reasons. Not yet an ordained minister—and thus not eligible for a position as a military chaplain out in the field—Althaus instead served as a chaplain in a military hospital [*Lazarettpfarrer*]. He held this post in Łódź, Poland beginning January 1915; he also worked among expatriated Germans as an administrative pastor in Łódź until the end of the war.<sup>3</sup>

It was during these years that Althaus began to develop his militant theology of *völkisch* nationalism; in his own words, it was in Poland that he ‘discovered Germanness.’<sup>4</sup> He was especially moved by the suffering of ethnic Germans living in ‘diaspora.’<sup>5</sup> Several recent studies have isolated Althaus’ experience in Łódź as the decisive factor in the development of the nationalistic political theology, which would culminate in his public endorsement of the Nazi regime in 1933.<sup>6</sup> Althaus said as much in an intimate account of his wartime memories to his Erlangen students in 1930:

The war brought me, as well as many others who were drawn into it at that time, two great, majestic things: first, solidarity [*Verbundenheit*] with German *Volkstum* beyond the borders of our state, in Poland and in the Baltics—it was among our German brothers in the East that we experienced for the first time what *Volk* and solidarity with the *Volk* really is. Then the

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<sup>2</sup> Hetzer, ‘*Deutsche Stunde*,’ 48. Through a survey of Althaus’ diary entries and publications in church bulletins and newsletters during the early years of the First World War, Hetzer shows that Althaus considered the German military campaign a ‘holy war’ and a ‘service to God.’ Althaus also saw the travail of war as an opportunity for religious revival in Germany. He would later argue that every member of the *Volk* who is fit for military service has a responsibility to comply with conscription. See Althaus, ‘Wehrpflicht,’ in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vol. 5., ed. Hermann Gunkel and Leopold Zscharnack (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1931), 1781–82. Hereafter referenced as *RGG*. Kurz argues that Althaus ‘sacramentalised death for the *Vaterland*’ (*Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 496).

<sup>3</sup> Drawing on diary entries, personal letters, and postcards, Jasper has provided an exhaustive account of Althaus’ experiences during the war. See Jasper, *Paul Althaus*, 57–82.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Die Entdeckung des Deutschtums im ehemaligen Mittelpolen,’ in *Deutschtum im Aufbruch: Von Volkstumskampf der Deutschen im östlichen Wartheland*, ed. Adolf Kargel and Eduard Kneifel (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1942).

<sup>5</sup> As Althaus described them in sermons collected as *Aus der Heimat: Lodzer Kriegspredigten* (Leipzig: Eger, 1916).

<sup>6</sup> Most notably Liebenberg’s *Der Gott der feldgrauen Männer* (2008), which cites Althaus’ experiences in Poland as the catalyst for his radical theology of experience. See also Kurz’s *Nationalprotestantisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (2007) and Hetzer’s ‘*Deutsche Stunde*’ (2009). For Fischer, ‘[Althaus’] discovery of Germanness [*Deutschtum*] in Poland is consequently a decisive milestone on the way to a centring on *Volkstum* that was both theologically and politically normative’ (*Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 90).



second thing: the experience of solidarity with German labourers who stood shoulder to shoulder with the young war volunteers in the trenches.<sup>7</sup>

In light of comments like these, Tanja Hetzer has concluded that the later development of Althaus' *völkisch* theology is only intelligible in view of this specific geopolitical experience in Poland.<sup>8</sup>

'The events of the winter of 1918–1919,' writes Karl-Wilhelm Dahm, 'were regarded as a political catastrophe by German Protestants.'<sup>9</sup> Althaus was no exception. He was deeply disturbed by the terms of the Versailles Treaty, which, on top of seemingly interminable reparations and severe sanctions, also demanded that the German state assume full culpability for the Great War. Walter Sparn has suggested that this 'trauma' of the catastrophe of 1918 signifies the most decisive 'biographical rupture' of Althaus' life. His disgust for this sham-peace, coupled with his exposure to the plight of ethnic Germans in the East, triggered a traumatic 'break' so jarring that it would characterise his political thought for the rest of his life.<sup>10</sup>

Althaus could hardly contain his rage as he reflected on the treaty in 1934:

At Christmas 1918, barely home from Poland, disgusted by the shameless voluntary surrender of the Germans, by the impeachment of the leader, by the undignified confession of German guilt for the war, I wrote: 'In the days of victory it was the task of the church to shatter all overconfidence, all arrogance, and all Phariseism in our *Volk*. But today, after our grave defeat and in our state of collapse, it falls to the church to call our *Volk* to the value of a good conscience and to the defiance of confident faith' (*The Reformation*, 26 January 1919). Then came June 28, 1919—that extorted confession of German guilt. Did the church at that time fulfill its pastoral duty, and has it done so since? Has it chastised the crime of Versailles, not only that of our enemies, but also the German crime of signing it?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Die soziale Verpflichtung des Studenten: Ansprache an die Erlanger Studentenschaft zum Abschluß einer sozialen Vortragsreihe am 9. Mai 1930,' *Zeitwende* 6:2 (1930), 289.

<sup>8</sup> Hetzer, 'Deutsche Stunde,' 51.

<sup>9</sup> Karl-Wilhelm Dahm, 'German Protestantism and Politics, 1918–19,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 3:1 (1968), 29. See Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 110–21, for a thorough summary of contemporary reactions to Versailles among Protestant theologians and churchmen.

<sup>10</sup> Sparn, 'Paul Althaus,' 4.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Althaus, *Die deutsche Stunde der Kirche*, 18. In a sermon preached on 18 January 1923, Althaus remarked that 'The wound of November 9, 1918 aches more today than ever before. The crime of June 28, 1919

Althaus' interpretation of the German defeat as an undignified surrender, as well as his contempt for the signatories of the treaty, is standard fare for the nationalistic rhetoric of the age. There are also faint traces of the 'stab-in-the-back' legend [*Dolchstoßlegende*] that appeared in conservative German preaching after Versailles and was revived in Nazi propaganda: cowards, traitors, and Jews on the home front had sabotaged the heroic young men in the trenches.<sup>12</sup> After the inglorious demise of the Hohenzollern Empire, Althaus regarded the new Weimar government with the 'admixture of fear and contempt' that characterised the attitudes of most of his fellow churchmen.<sup>13</sup>

There are a number of reasons that the nascent Weimar democracy was poorly received by many Protestant churchmen, though the majority eventually made their peace with it. Christian theologians and pastors like Althaus—suffering from what Fischer has called 'crisis syndrome'—feared that the German way of life was under double siege: 1) the alien forces of urbanisation, secularism, liberalism, pluralism and individualism were rapidly pulling German society apart, and 2) corrosive cosmopolitan spirituality threatened to disintegrate Germany's historic bond with the Christian faith.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the widespread corruption of German

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has now backfired as a punishing curse over our *Volk*.' See 'Losung für den deutschen Kampf,' in *Der Lebendige: Rockstocker Predigten*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1926), 114.

<sup>12</sup> See Arlie Hoover, *The Gospel of Nationalism: German Patriotic Preaching from Napoleon to Versailles* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1986), 140–41. For the use of this legend in Nazi rhetoric, see Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) and David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Taylor & Francis, 2007). Fischer notes that Althaus subscribed to a form of this legend in *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist* (141). See also Kurz, *Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 413.

<sup>13</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 36. Writing in 1926, Otto Dibelius summarised: 'Since the mood of the church is overwhelmingly hostile to the republic, the Church's attitude toward the new state is one of great reserve.' See Dibelius, *Das Jahrhundert der Kirche* (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1926), 76.

<sup>14</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 24–26. Ericksen has argued that Althaus' fear of modernity is the 'crucial element' to understanding his political thought. See *Theologians Under Hitler*, 119. On the cultural, social, and sexual developments which many Christian theologians found disturbing during Weimar, see Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Norton, 2001) and Eric Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

morals, conservative theologians also railed against Weimar's capitalist economic policies and western-style government as foreign to the German spirit.<sup>15</sup> Yet Althaus in particular also objected to Weimar because, by usurping the authority to determine Germany's national destiny from God and placing it in the hands of the masses, the democratic system violated the orders of creation. Weimar distorted Althaus' ideal vision of theonomic government, wherein authority derives only from God and is administered only through legitimate hierarchical structures.<sup>16</sup>

All the same, Althaus was in the end able to reach an uneasy rapprochement with the young Republic, even if it was for pragmatic reasons. The evidence suggests that he probably never considered the Weimar Republic a viable form of government for the German people; it was always provisional—an 'emergency state' [*Notbau*] and a makeshift protection against 'the very worst—chaos and anarchy.'<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, after negotiating a settlement in which the *Landeskirchen* retained their autonomy and privileged status, most Protestant leaders could muster some support for the new democracy with their heads if not necessarily with their hearts.<sup>18</sup> Fundamentally, though, Althaus continued to think of Weimar as a concrete symbol of Germany's national humiliation at Versailles:

The government and its constitution at that time were also the expression and the means of German debasement and its atrophied state. But those men gave their Yes to cooperation, because—in all its debasement, inadequacy, and impotence—it was nevertheless at that moment the only possible governmental form for the German life.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Sparr, 'Paul Althaus,' 10.

<sup>16</sup> See Paul Althaus, *Obrigkeit und Führertum: Wandlungen des evangelischen Staatsethos in Deutschland* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1936), 10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 51. Tanja Hetzer has shown convincingly that the entire trajectory of Althaus' political thinking has always been 'anti-democratic' and that he took 'an explicit political position against democracy and the Weimar constitution' ('*Deutsche Stunde*,' 237–38).

<sup>18</sup> The Protestant leadership's pragmatic settlement with the Weimar Republic is a central premise of J.R.C. Wright, '*Above Parties*': *The Political Attitudes of the German Protestant Church Leadership 1918–1933*, Oxford Historical Monographs (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), especially chapters 1 and 3.

<sup>19</sup> Althaus, *Obrigkeit und Führertum*, 52. Though he despised the principles of the Weimar state, the surrounding passage makes clear that Althaus feels constrained against the notion of revolution by Romans 13 and his Lutheran tradition. Even though he considered Weimar a 'debased, inadequate, and impotent'

Near the apex of Weimar's ill-fated tenure, he lamented from the pulpit: 'We live between the times. Our past has sunk beneath the mighty hand of God; power, freedom, and honour have been shattered for us Germans. . . ' Patriots could do nothing but 'wait for a new German day.'<sup>20</sup>

The writings of the Weimar period represent Althaus' attempt to make sense of life 'between the times.' During these years he reflected on the nature and limits of *Volkstum*—that is, not only ethnic belonging, but also a *Volk's* awareness of being a *Volk* as it enacts its customs and sensibilities in concrete ways.<sup>21</sup> Through this concentration on *Volkstum* he also develops theological and *völkisch* criteria by which to determine what—or who—is *not* German. It is therefore not surprising that Althaus' first public comments on the 'Jewish Question' appear during the Weimar years, though the public debate about the civil position of Jews had been ongoing since the eighteenth century. His writings from the pre-Weimar period, curiously, make virtually no mention of the Jews, despite his involvement in the *völkisch* movement in Poland, where he would have undoubtedly encountered Jewish communities.<sup>22</sup> Instead, Althaus reserved judgment on the 'Jewish Question' until

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government, he still preferred imperfect order to chaos. As Jasper has shown, Althaus remained skeptical not only of democracy generally, but also that the Weimar Republic in particular could achieve the renewal of the German spirit. See 'Die Friedrich-Alexander-Universität,' 261.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Sind wir in dem Deutschland von heute nicht Fremdlinge?', (November 1924), quoted in Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 451. On September 14, 1930, the federal election day in which the Nazi party claimed 107 seats, Althaus spoke ominously of the coming day of judgment of the 'leaders of the *Volk*,' presumably the leaders of the Weimar Republic. See 'Vom Bau des Hauses Gottes,' in *Der Gegenwärtige: Predigten* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1932), 43–44.

<sup>21</sup> I leave *Volkstum* untranslated throughout the thesis as no one English term captures the meanings Althaus encodes into the word. For Althaus, *Volkstum* expresses every dimension of a *Volk's* identity: language, material culture, religion, social custom, spiritual and intellectual sensibilities, as well as biological factors. Critically, the word also communicates the concrete ways in which the *Volk* performs its distinct ethnic identity. This is what I mean to convey in stating that *Volkstum* is the *Volk's awareness* of being a *Volk*.

<sup>22</sup> Fischer concludes: 'During Althaus' time in Poland neither are the Polish Jews a theme for him, nor does antisemitism play a role in his publications—despite the very high proportion of Jews in the local population, which, next to the Germans, represented the largest minority in Catholic Poland' (*Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 509). This conclusion is supported by the conspicuous absence of comment on Jews or Judaism in the material treated in Liebenberg's study.

the late 1920s, by which time public antisemitism had reached a fever pitch. But these writings reveal not a fanatic, but a conservative theologian with a contextually moderate approach to the ‘Jewish Question.’

## **TWO | THE JEWS AS SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL THREAT: *KIRCHE UND VOLKSTUM* (1927)**

Different theologians posed the ‘Jewish Question’ in different terms. Depending on whether one privileged ‘blood’ [*Blut*] or ‘spirit’ [*Geist*] as the determinative force of *Volkstum*, the Jews represented either a threat to the racial-biological purity of the *Volk* or a moral hazard to its culture.<sup>23</sup> One of the most striking features of Althaus’ comments about the Jews, however, is that they do not conform to the ‘blood/spirit’ dichotomy. Rather, the Jews emerge as a danger in both the physical and spiritual dimensions of *Volkstum*. Althaus does, on balance, weight spirit more heavily than blood, but both play a critical role. This is evident in *Kirche und Volkstum*, originally delivered as an address at the second *deutscher Kirchentag* at Königsberg on June 17, 1927. These are Althaus’ first public remarks about the ‘Jewish Question.’ They are also perhaps the clearest representation of his mediatory personality.<sup>24</sup>

*Kirche und Volkstum* tries to straddle the rapidly-rising *völkisch* movement and what Althaus perceives to be the historic Christian foundations of German society. He thus feels a ‘tension’ between church and *Volkstum*. To resolve this

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<sup>23</sup> The analysis is Töllner’s. See *Eine Frage der Rasse?*, 112. Töllner judges that Althaus, as opposed to his colleague Elert, stressed the ‘cultural dimension’ of the ‘Jewish Question’ over its ‘biological dimension.’ While Töllner’s conclusion is not wrong, it seems to me that Althaus does not separate the two consistently. While it is a useful diagnostic tool, the distinction between *Blut* and *Geist* (or biology and culture) is often blurred in racist rhetoric. As Susannah Heschel has pointed out, the racial theorists of the Althaus’ era considered the body ‘the physical incarnation of moral and spiritual qualities.’ That is, a Jew’s warped body mirrored the disfigurement of his spirit. See ‘The Slippery Yet Tenacious Nature of Racism: New Developments in Critical Race Theory and Their Implications for the Study of Religion and Ethics,’ *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 35:1 (2015), 12.

<sup>24</sup> Ericksen has characterised Althaus as a ‘mediator’ in *Theologians Under Hitler*, 79f.

tension, he fashions the christianised patriotism that would come to define his writings of the era.<sup>25</sup> Yet the essay also reveals his penchant for alarmism and decisionist rhetoric that, at moments, overrides his moderate temperament. Germany, says Althaus, now stands in its ‘hour of destiny,’ in a moment of ‘a new consciousness of our national type and responsibility, a passionate desire for the rebirth of our *Volk* out of the procreative power of our *Volkstum*.’<sup>26</sup> *Kirche und Volkstum*, then, is a call to arms in defence of the *Volk* in an hour of apocalyptic trial. Although the speech’s immediate concern is the preservation of German cultural values in ethnic German expatriate communities situated amongst foreign populations, its focus turns quickly toward the alienation of the *Volk* taking place on German soil. It is within this framework that the Jews emerge out of Althaus’ imagination as a foil to the German national type and as an impediment to the realisation of the German destiny. Althaus’ theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ takes shape only when set into relief against his vision for a vibrant society rooted in a distinctly Christian *Volkstum*.

Althaus begins with the *Volk* as an elemental and unalterable order of creation:

We mean by *Volkstum* the unique spiritual vitality [*Seelentum*] which distinguishes us from others and appears in the collective feelings, values, desires, and thoughts of all our ethnic compatriots; the species-specific spiritual-psycho nature instilled in the womb; a transcendent reality, original for all of us with our given life, before all of our decisions and desires. A primordial givenness [*Eine ursprünglichen Gegebenheit*] . . . a spiritual reality, mysteriously born of spiritual primal origination, and . . . carried on spiritually in history through the love which enflames it.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ in *Evangelium und Leben: Gesammelte Vorträge* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1927), 138–39.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*, 113–14, 142–43.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 114. Althaus had begun to develop this line of thinking as early as 1919, where he argues that the *Volk* is both temporally and ontologically prior to the individual. Here, he speaks of an individual’s ‘primordial rootedness’ [*ursprüngliche Verwurzelung*] in the *Volk*. See ‘Das Erlebnis der Kirche,’ *Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 52:39 (1919), 841–42. Althaus also locates the origins of the *Volk* beyond rationality; the bond to one’s *Volkstum* is an ‘I-Thou’ relationship, which is ‘entirely irrational, pre-rational,

‘Community of blood’ [*Blutsgemeinschaft*] is also a necessary condition for the origination of the *Volk*, though it is only one of several vital components. A *Volk* cannot originate without purity of blood, but once the *Volk* does originate, it can sustain itself even in foreign environments by virtue of the critical power of its spiritual vitality.<sup>28</sup> The perceived danger posed by Jews living in German society is only intelligible with the understanding that for Althaus the *Volk* is a spiritual entity. The *Volk* derives its strength not primarily through its bloodlines, but through its *Seelentum*: ‘However great the importance of blood in spiritual history may be, once a nationality has been born, the prevailing factor is still spirit and not blood.’<sup>29</sup>

As a spiritual reality, the *Volk* is a manifestation of God’s creative will. On this account Althaus can indeed speak of the *Volk* as God’s own self-revelation, albeit in a qualified sense. That one is born German is not a matter of coincidence, but of providence.<sup>30</sup> God has revealed himself to the German *Volk* in a special way. For Althaus, one cannot speak of the German heritage without speaking of Christianity. As Liebenberg has observed, Althaus, in line with his predilection for martial language beginning during his chaplaincy in Poland, imagines the German *Volk* (and later, the Church) as a Christian soldier entrusted with a mission from God, the commanding officer.<sup>31</sup> Because of its profound but onerous spiritual genius, the *Volk* bears ‘the burden of German loneliness’:

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irrevocable, immutable.’ See ‘Das Vaterland,’ in *Der Student vor Gott: Motive zur Neugestaltung des inneren Lebens in der deutschen akademischen Jugend*, ed. Georg Muntzschick (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1929), 241.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Of course, a *Volk* cannot come into being without that condition, e.g. the unity of blood. But once the *Volk* has originated, it can, as a spiritual reality, continue living—indeed continue procreating—through its spiritual power. . . . It may, as we have abundantly experienced in our own German folk-history, even appropriate itself among foreign blood’ (‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 115).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 123–24, 127. It is important to note at this point that for Althaus the German *Volk* is not intrinsically superior to any other *Volk*, as we shall see.

<sup>31</sup> Liebenberg, *Der Gott der feldgrauen Männer*, 394–95.

The peoples receive different missions from the Lord of history. Our *Volk* has testified to God throughout our history, in which God has entrusted it with something unique. The German Reformation, German idealism, the German destiny of crisis and struggle, the struggle for unity and freedom through the ages . . . our *Volk* has had to endure the deepest questions of humanity more painfully and more profoundly than any other people, and is thus maintained and consecrated as a special priesthood of the knowledge of the last things.<sup>32</sup>

The Germans are a nation of priests, which, paradoxically, is a designation historically reserved for the people of Israel. But unlike the Jews, the German nature has essentially been ‘shaped by the Gospel.’ The point is so central to Althaus’ theology of the *Volk* that it can scarcely be overstated: to be German is to be Christian.<sup>33</sup>

In order to protect the German heritage, Christian theology is charged with the purification of the impulses of the *völkisch* movement, which, though holy and good, threaten to devolve into a toxic idolisation of the *Volk*. On the one hand, the churches guard against *Übermut* (‘arrogance’), through which ‘a *Volk* can puff itself up as a lordly race and with which it can feed its assertiveness so that it makes little of and despises the other races.’<sup>34</sup> To temper the presumption to racial dominance Althaus warns that one must love one’s *Volk* ‘not because it is more glorious than

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<sup>32</sup> Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 125–26. Cf. Althaus, ‘Volk,’ *Glaube und Volk* I (1931): ‘We thank [God] for the bitterly difficult and crisis-filled history of the Germans through which he has forced us into the depth of thought and faith’ (5).

<sup>33</sup> ‘The unity of “German=Christian and Christian=German is a clear, bright, and general fact. For thus testify the greatest hours, the most glorious men of our history’ (‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 121–22). Since the German soul is unequivocally Christian, Althaus saw the attempt to revive Teutonic prehistory as ‘pointless’ (121) and spoke of the ‘unmistakable danger of a Germanic-Christian mixed religion [*Mischreligion*]’ (132). He would remain critical of neo-pagan movements into the Nazi years, targeting in particular the indologist Wilhelm Hauer, founder of the German Faith Movement [*Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*], in a 1935 tract: ‘Hauer will deny [Christian doctrine] for himself and for his friends. But he does not have the right to speak in the name of the German people.’ See Althaus, ‘Schuld und Verantwortung im Deutschglauben: zur Auseinandersetzung mit Wilhelm Hauer,’ in *Theologische Aufsätze: Zweiter Band* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1935), 138. Compare also Althaus, ‘Das Evangelium Deutsche,’ *Glaube und Volk* 1:3 (1932), 42–43. Althaus would continue to criticise the German Faith Movement well into the 1930s. For him, once a *Volk* has encountered Jesus Christ, there remain only two choices: Christian faith or anti-Christianity [*Christusglaube oder Antichristentum*]. Put bluntly: there simply is no other religious alternative, such as neo-paganism, for the German people. See ‘Volk ohne Christus?,’ *Zeitwende* 14:8 (1937), 450–51.

<sup>34</sup> Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 125.



any other, but simply because it is my *Volk*!’<sup>35</sup> All peoples stand under the judgment of the Kingdom of God, which transcends every ethnic bond. On the other hand, however, Christian theology must also guard against *Kleinmut* (‘faintheartedness’), which ‘does not venture to accept or seize the special calling of its own *Volk* [and] its God-given place and therefore its endless responsibility also to keep one’s own *Volk* strong, free, and pure.’<sup>36</sup> For Althaus, Christian theology guides *völkisch* zeal between blasphemous overconfidence and cowardly underconfidence, in part by identifying and appropriating the theological meaning of Jewish existence.

But the German *Volk* has squandered its spiritual heritage. ‘Our divine vocation [*Gottesberuf*]*—*we recognise with great shame*—*has not been fulfilled. The German soul has lost itself.’<sup>37</sup> Specifically, the Christian character of the German *Volk*, along with its concomitant destiny in the world, is disintegrating under the pressure of the twin dangers of ‘civilisation’ [*die Zivilisation*] and ‘strangers’ or ‘foreigners [*die Fremde*].’ These two forces conspire to corrode German society:

Our *Volk*, so we hear, has lost itself. Lost itself to civilisation, lost itself to the foreigner. To civilisation: this means rational organisation instead of a growing organism; the corruption of the masses instead of membership in the people’s body; a ‘society’ of unconnected individuals instead of an organic community; rootlessness and homelessness, both inward and outward, instead of inward and outward rootedness in our soil; disinheritance instead of life in the heritage of our fathers.<sup>38</sup>

In Althausian idiom, *die Zivilisation* and *die Fremde* are actually the same thing: the ‘foreign infiltration’ whose chief symbol is the Jews. Tanja Hetzer has identified his

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Compare Althaus, ‘Volk’: ‘We love our *Volk* not because it is so brave and glorious, but because it is our *Volk* according to the ordinances of God’ (5). See also Althaus, ‘Das Vaterland,’ where he suggests that Germans should love their *Vaterland* ‘not because it is of a higher worth than other countries, not because its *Volk* is of a nobler race, of richer gifts, or more majestic virtues. . . . Much of that will indeed be true. But we do not love Germany on that account. We love it because it is our *Vaterland*’ (240–41).

<sup>36</sup> Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 125.

<sup>37</sup> Althaus, ‘Losung für den deutschen Kampf,’ 118. Cf. Althaus, ‘Der Weg des Glaubens’ (11 November 1923), in *Der Lebendige: Rostocker Predigten* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1926), 199f.

<sup>38</sup> Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 115.

use of the term ‘civilisation’ as a culturally encoded reference to the Jews: ‘Without using the word Jew even once, Althaus portrays the corrosive enemy of the people’s community in the cultural code of the time, which connected all of these things with Jews.’<sup>39</sup> Through the use of rhetorical associations—the key words ‘rootless,’ ‘homeless,’ and ‘big-city’—Althaus targets the abstract Jew as the prime cause of the ‘fracturing of our *Volk* and . . . the decay of our national community.’<sup>40</sup> In speaking of the ‘foreign infiltration’ [*Überfremdung*] encroaching onto German soil and emblemised in her ‘big cities,’ Althaus is aiming at Jews.<sup>41</sup>

Althaus complains of the *socio-political* dimension of the ‘Jewish Question,’ that ‘the stranger is a force even in our homeland,’ exerting dominance through the ‘foreign infiltration of our literature, theaters, our art, our fashion and festivities, the party system and public affairs. . .’<sup>42</sup> But he suspects that the moral degeneracy of Weimar is only symptomatic of a more serious spiritual sickness. The real danger posed by the Jews is *spiritual*; because Germany is a Christian nation, moral alienation actually threatens the very constitution of the *Volk*. In a sermon delivered to the student association at Rostock four years earlier, Althaus had intimated that the

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<sup>39</sup> Hetzer, ‘*Deutsche Stunde*,’ 152–53.

<sup>40</sup> Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 116. The term ‘rootless’ in particular is loaded with antisemitic freight. As Yoder has shown, by the nineteenth century *völkisch* thinkers were contrasting the urban *Entwurzelung* (‘uprootedness’) of Jews with the ‘bucolic rootedness’ of the noble German peasant. See *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 25–27.

<sup>41</sup> Lowell Green has argued that Althaus’ concern in this address is with ‘hardened capitalists, whether Jewish or Gentile, who believed had abandoned the moral teaching of religion, possessed remarkable talents in the world of business, and had become unscrupulous and ruthless in taking over world industry’ (*Lutherans Against Hitler*, 118). Yoder has made a similar suggestion: Althaus is using the stereotypical ‘Jew’ as a metaphor for manifold societal problems: dehumanisation in the economy, the degradation of marriage, and the decline of the church’s influence in German life. See *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 102–03. For reasons I will argue below, this reading, while not incorrect, is insufficient; it is clear from the corpus of Althaus’ anti-Jewish writings that he is concerned with the influence of the Jewish *persons* who stand behind the metaphor.

<sup>42</sup> Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 116. André Fischer has characterised this widespread attitude as the ‘fear of foreign infiltration [*Überfremdungsangst*]’ (*Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 24–25). Here Althaus demonstrates close proximity to the NSDAP party platform of 24 February 1920, particularly points 23 and 24, which attacked the influence of the ‘Jewish and materialistic spirit’ in civil and cultural life. Althaus’ fear over the ‘spiritual’ influence of Jews shows an awareness of Nazi ideology, according to which Jews are both biological and spiritual threats. See Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus*, 135–38. By 1934 Althaus would congratulate the new Nazi state for its efforts to ‘sweep away the filth of corruption’ and ‘fend off the powers of degeneration [*Zersetzung*] in literature and theater’ (‘Das Ja der Kirche zur deutschen Wende,’ 7).

moral degeneracy of foreigners (read: Jews) can infect Germans: ‘We are degenerating not only because of foreigners [*die Fremde*], but also through our own demoralisation.’<sup>43</sup> Back in 1923 he had suggested that an influx of alien spirituality had already made Germans ‘foreigners in our own land.’<sup>44</sup>

Althaus would express his fear of, and hostility toward, *Überfremdung* most stridently in his 1929 tract, ‘Das Vaterland.’ Here again, he uses pathological language to describe the diseased state of German self-consciousness. Love of *Vaterland*, he laments, has grown ‘anemic’ [*blutleer*] under a ‘surge of cosmopolitan slogans and ideas.’<sup>45</sup> The essay ties together several xenophobic (and antisemitic) themes as it builds toward its virulent climax, where the pathological dimension of the dialectic comes through clearly:

Where there is love, there must also be wrath and hate. Whoever loves his *Volk*-type must also hate all degeneracy and anti-type [*Unart*]. We hate the faithlessness and torpor that is squandering our heritage; we hate the disgraceful foreign infiltration [*Ausländerei*], which is making us into apes and slaves to vile foreign fashion in theater and dance, in literature and in music. We hate the toxin that is spewing out of the big cities into our country through decadent literature, press, and stage performances. . . . We sense the *Volk*’s enemies in its midst, people who speak its language and eat its bread but are nevertheless its corruptors.<sup>46</sup>

The subtext of this statement, as Roland Kurz has noted, is a culturally encoded attack on Jews.<sup>47</sup> In particular, it is a broadside against emancipated and assimilated crypto-Jews who are all the more dangerous precisely because they *appear* German—they ‘speak our language and eat our bread’—but are actually enemies and agents of societal disintegration. These invisible Jews, streaming out of the ‘big city,’

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<sup>43</sup> Althaus, ‘Losung für den deutschen Kampf,’ 120.

<sup>44</sup> Althaus, ‘Der Weg des Glaubens,’ 198.

<sup>45</sup> Althaus, ‘Das Vaterland,’ 240.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 243. Purely metaphorical readings of Althaus’ anti-Jewish rhetoric cannot account for a passage like this, where he is characterising the enemies of the *Volk* as persons who perform embodied tasks like speaking and eating.

<sup>47</sup> See Kurz, *Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 464.

represent the most poisonous form of *Ausländerei*—a theme which will resurface in Althaus' other writings on the 'Jewish Question.'<sup>48</sup>

The threat of 'Jewish power and the Jewish spirit' is immanent above all in the form of emancipated Jewry, and, as will become clear in his comments during the Weimar period, Althaus diagnoses the 'Jewish Question' as a spiritual crisis which Christian theology alone is competent to treat. 'Our *Volk*,' he insists, 'expects today a clear word of pastoral counsel . . . what has been said up to now is not enough! [Therefore] the churches must . . . have an eye and a word for the Jewish threat to our *Volkstum*.'<sup>49</sup> Even as he openly acknowledges a Jewish 'threat,' Althaus, paradoxically, understands himself to be combatting the 'wild antisemitism, with which so many in our *Volk* today have been carried away.'<sup>50</sup> As an antidote to frenzied racial hatred, Althaus substitutes what Tanja Hetzer has called his 'pastoral antisemitism.'<sup>51</sup>

Althaus addresses the 'Jewish Question' here:

It is not a matter of Jew-hatred [*Judenhaß*]<sup>52</sup>—one can even come to an agreement with serious Jews on this point—it is not a matter of blood, it is not even a matter of the religious faith of Judaism, but rather it is a matter of a threat [*Bedrohung*] posed through a certain demoralised and demoralising big-city spirituality [*großstädtische Geistigkeit*] whose bearer is now primarily the Jewish *Volk*.<sup>52</sup>

The dominant logic of Althaus' theology of the 'Jewish Question' is encoded within this excerpt. *When* are the Jews dangerous? Not when they marry amongst themselves and not when they confine themselves to the synagogue. The Jews

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<sup>48</sup> See 73–75 below on Jews as 'invisible others.'

<sup>49</sup> Althaus, 'Kirche und Volkstum,' 130.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> See Hetzer, 'Deutsche Stunde,' 149–56.

<sup>52</sup> Althaus, 'Kirche und Volkstum,' 131. Althaus now connects the brief allusion to the evils of the 'big city' made earlier in the address directly to the influence of the Jews. In so doing, he stands within a long tradition of German Protestant exegesis that blames Jews for the degeneration of the moral order. See Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism*, 601–09.

become dangerous when they intrude into public life, when they blur the bloodlines between Jew and German, but above all when they disappear into German society by erasing external identifying markers. And *why* are Jews dangerous? Not because Jews are an inherently inferior race, but because they bear the foreign spirituality of a foreign *Volkstum*. The problem arises when Jews violate the orders of creation—when they try to overcome the primordial origination of the *Volk*—that is, when they try to become Germans. Strangers—that is, *assimilated* Jews—are camouflaged contagions who infect Germans with a deadly sickness of spirit.

Althaus considers the Jews' moral bankruptcy to be self-evident, and he expects any 'serious Jew' to recognise why Germans feel threatened by them. After all, says Althaus, even the Jews' own scriptures testify to their 'ignorance, fallibility, and sin': 'The Old Testament is a book at war with itself [*ein mit sich kämpfendes Buch*]; semitic and yet at the same time, as someone well said, the most antisemitic book in the world—struggling against "Judah," with a seriousness and depth that no *völkisch* wrath could ever match.'<sup>53</sup> The immorality of the Jews has grave consequences for Germans. The Jews' degeneracy, if allowed to infect the German spiritual life, threatens to shipwreck the mission with which God has entrusted the German nation. 'The churches must recognise and show where the powers stand that

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<sup>53</sup> Althaus, 'Kirche und Volkstum,' 136. It must be noted that Althaus does believe there is a critical place for the Old Testament in German church life and rejects efforts to de-judaize the Scriptures. Though the Old Testament is not binding for a Christian, it is 'full of Christ' and is thus valuable to a Christian, whose posture should be one of 'freedom over' and 'commitment to' the Old Testament. He recommends that the church 'lead the fight [against legalism] not with the *furor teutonicus* against the "Jew-book," but in the name of Christian freedom, in the name of the correctly understood authority of the living God' (136). Elsewhere in the same period, Althaus concludes that the Jews do not know how to read their own Scriptures. In particular, the Jews have misread the Messianic pronouncements of the prophets. This, for Althaus, is the 'the Gospel's question to modern Judaism,' a question to which the Jews cannot give a satisfactory answer. See 'Die Frage des Evangeliums,' 212–13.

again and again hinder of our *Volk* in its self-determination and purification

[*Selbstbesinnung und Reinigung*].<sup>54</sup>

By this point in Althaus' rhetoric, the Jews have become a 'power' that threatens to thwart the realisation of the German spiritual destiny. The 'demoralised and demoralising big-city spirituality' of the Jews is unraveling the fabric of German community life by infecting public morality. Because of this, the sword of God's judgment hangs poised over German society.<sup>55</sup> What Althaus truly fears is that the influence of the Jews will undo Germany's *Christian heritage*, thereby sapping it of its spiritual vitality and leaving behind only secularised and disconnected individuals where there was once a vibrant people's community born of the German soul's deep connection with the Gospel.

In the same period, Althaus prescribes extreme measures to combat any influence that would jeopardise the integrity of the *Volk*. 'Like all genuine love,' he writes, 'patriotism carries within itself wrath and hate against all threat to the life of the *Vaterland*, from within or from without, against the degeneration, enfeeblement and distortion of the state.'<sup>56</sup> Once the rhetorical associations are decoded, this statement can be read as a call for defence against the alleged socio-political dominance of the Jews.<sup>57</sup> In Althausian theology, a 'people's church' [*Volkskirche*]

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<sup>54</sup> Althaus, 'Kirche und Volkstum,' 131.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Althaus' sermon for Repentance Sunday, 1928: 'Das Gericht des Wortes Gottes,' (26 February 1928) in *Der Gegenwärtige*, 7–8. In this period, Althaus uses the phrase 'big city' as a code word to trigger rhetorical associations with Jews, who were associated with the rapid urbanisation of German society between the 1870s and the 1920s. See Aly, *Why the Germans?*, 66–68.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Vaterlandsliebe (Patriotismus),' in *RGK*, vol. 5., 1441.

<sup>57</sup> In his encyclopedia entry on patriotism, Althaus uses the language of *Bedrohung* (threat) and *Entartung* (degradation/degeneration), words he had used in connection with the Jewish influence on German society in 'Kirche und Volkstum' (115–16, 119, 130–31). At the very least, it is clear that the Jews epitomise the kind of threat that must be confronted with the 'wrath and hate' that Althaus prescribes in 'Vaterlandsliebe.' Jewish participation in the cultural and civil life of German reached its apex during the Weimar Republic. Moreover, the rise of Jewish influence corresponded to the development of political liberalism. As a result, the feeble democratic state and 'the Jews' were bound closely in the conservative Protestant imagination, where Jews were seen as 'bearers of the liberal tradition.' See Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus*, 75–89. See also 'Christian Teaching about Jews,' where Lindemann notes that the Weimar Republic was commonly referred to as the 'Jewish republic' (42).

fulfills a patriotic function in its defense of the *Volk* against this threat. It will ‘struggle alongside all who fight for the rejuvenation of an already sick folk-life, work courageously for the preservation and renewal of old morals, organic connections, and for the overcoming of the big-city decay of the *Volk*, for a return to a healthy folk-life rooted in our soil.’<sup>58</sup> By using the language of pathology and sickness, Althaus isolates Jews as contagions who contribute toward a ‘sick folk-life’ and obstruct German ‘purification.’

Again, translated out of the Althausian idiom, this essentially amounts to a challenge for the churches to fight against the influence of the Jews, who are threats to the spiritual vitality of the German *Volk* from within. That is to say, Althaus’ comments on the ‘Jewish Question’ must be understood within the wider framework of his call for a re-christianisation of Germany. The sick body of the German *Volk* can only be restored to health through Christian proclamation, which entails overcoming the influence of Judaism: ‘The destiny of our disrupted *Volk* ultimately depends on the power of Christ . . . which means, as far as our responsibility goes: the future of our *Volk* depends on the vitality of our German churches.’<sup>59</sup>

Within the logic of Althaus’ vision for a christianised *völkisch* ideology, it becomes clear why the Jews pose such a danger. It is not, in the strictest sense, a matter of straightforward ‘Jew hatred’ or purity of blood, since spiritual vitality, and not blood, is the critical force of *Volkstum*. It is perhaps more a matter of ‘losing one’s national identity,’ as Hans Schwarz has suggested.<sup>60</sup> After all, Althaus seems to

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<sup>58</sup> Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 139. At 127f. Althaus emphasises that it is one of the church’s responsibilities to support patriotism. He had complained of the ‘sickness’ of the *Volk* already in his 1923 sermon ‘Losung für den deutschen Kampf’ (116f.).

<sup>59</sup> Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 126–27. He later summarised: ‘*Volkstum* must seek the church, but the church must also seek *Volkstum*.’ The way forward clearly lay in a revival of the nation’s Christian past, for which both Judaism and Teutonic neo-paganism are obstacles. See also Althaus, ‘Volk ohne Christus?’, 454–57.

<sup>60</sup> Schwarz, ‘Paul Althaus’ (2013), 143.

indicate that if the Jews would just stay in their synagogues and out of the public sector, the danger would be partially alleviated. But in the call for a ‘defence against the powers of alienation and decay’ within the context of a ‘rebirth of the life of the *Volk* out of its own sources,’<sup>61</sup> Althaus is imagining the Jew, in part, as an opponent of the German.

However, it is precisely as a menace that the Jews actually perform a critical role in Althaus’s theology as a ‘force’ that hinders German self-determination. Across *Kirche und Volkstum*, Althaus uses this alleged threat of Jewish influence as a catalyst for the re-christianisation of Germany. But Althaus’ statements also meet the criteria for what Langmuir has called ‘xenophobic assertions’—that is, allegations that do not actually refer primarily to actual Jewish persons, but to a ‘felt social menace.’<sup>62</sup> The Jews function as an abstraction, a symbol of the *kind of threat* Althaus fears—namely, secular ideology. The Jews, as they fill Germany’s big cities with their poisonous brand of secularising and demoralising spirituality, serve as a necessary foil against which a revitalised Christian Germany must concentrate its renewed spiritual vitality in order to fulfill its vocation as a nation of lonely priests.

### **THREE | THE JEWS AS THE BEARERS OF A ‘DIFFICULT FATE’: *LEITSÄTZE ZUR ETHIK* (1929)**

Althaus’ clearest interpretation of the ‘Jewish Question’ appears in his *Leitsätze zur Ethik* of 1929, in which he addresses the ‘Jewish Question’ within the framework of his larger ethical schema. The enterprise of ethics itself is grounded in the Lutheran doctrine of the ‘historical orders.’<sup>63</sup> The *Volk*, but not necessarily the

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<sup>61</sup> Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 116.

<sup>62</sup> See Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, 330–31. Althaus’ rhetoric in this section probably does not meet the threshold for Langmuir’s narrow definition of antisemitism as ‘chimerical assertions.’

<sup>63</sup> Paul Althaus, *Leitsätze zur Ethik* (Erlangen: Merkel, 1929), 47. For Althaus, there is a distinction to be made between ‘historical orders’ and ‘natural orders [*Naturordnungen*].’ The ordinances of marriage, *Volkstum*, law, the state, and the economy are ‘historical’ insofar as they are more than bare nature; they require



related concept of race, is one such historical order, and is explicated along with the ordinances of marriage and family as well as the state and the legal system.<sup>64</sup> In this treatise, Althaus develops the basic logic of *Kirche und Volkstum* into a more explicit formulation that would dictate his thinking on the ‘Jewish Question’ for the remainder of the Weimar years.

Before offering his own partial solution to the problem of Jewish presence in Germany, Althaus begins with an overview of unworkable proposals. In so doing, he rejects both the total inclusion and the total exclusion of the Jews as tenable solutions. In *Leitsätze zur Ethik*, Althaus reveals his basic assumptions about the nature of Jewish existence and the Enlightenment’s failed attempt to solve the ‘Jewish Question.’ Despite over a century of debate about the civil reform of the Jews, he complains, the ‘Jewish Question’ still ‘belongs among the most difficult national questions for us Germans.’<sup>65</sup>

For all of the mystery surrounding the ‘Jewish Question,’ Althaus is unequivocal that the methods of the Enlightenment have failed to solve it. The urgency of the question ‘cannot be denied with Enlightenment liberalism [*aufklärerischen Liberalismus*]. It is posed, in spite of all the assimilation, through the foreignness [*Fremdheit*] between the Jewish and German ethnic types [*Volksart*], which is now felt more strongly than ever . . .’<sup>66</sup> Ironically, all of the efforts of emancipation and assimilation throughout the prior centuries—which had always

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human participation in history to bring them to completion. See Paul Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1935), 9–10.

<sup>64</sup> Over the course of the thesis I treat the ordinances of *Volk* and state extensively while mostly leaving aside the order of marriage as peripheral to the main argument. However, as Yoder has shown, the institution of marriage is central to Althaus’ ethical system as it is the most fundamental form of human relationship, out of which all other relationships grow. See *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 62–66.

<sup>65</sup> Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 54.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

been incomplete and partial at any rate<sup>67</sup>—had not diminished, but only exacerbated the differences between Jews and Germans. On these grounds, Althaus dismisses the political project of emancipation and assimilation as an acceptable solution.<sup>68</sup>

Althaus is willing to entertain the possibility that the essential incongruity of the Jewish and German ‘ethnic type’ might be overcome ‘in individuals’ through something like acculturation, in which a particular Jew might experience a ‘deep ingrowing’ into the German type.<sup>69</sup> The concession to isolated individuals notwithstanding, he does not think acculturation will work on a larger scale. By and large, Jews will remain Jews and cannot (and should not) become Germans because the boundaries of each *Volk*, pursuant to the orders of creation, are impermeable. Althaus’ posture here is representative of his characteristic distrust of Enlightenment rationalism; his criticism of assimilation is also an attack on the Enlightenment project in general. For Althaus, the fundamental laws of the orders of creation trump the logic of Enlightenment discourse, which relies on the concepts of universal human dignity and basic human equality to flatten fixed and intrinsic ethnic differences.

Because he situates his account of Jewish existence within the context of the doctrine of the orders of creation, Althaus will not grant that all human beings are simply entitled to the same liberties and rights. On the contrary, humanity’s historical

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<sup>67</sup> See David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry 1780–1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), especially chapter 1, on the ambivalent legacy of the project of emancipation and assimilation.

<sup>68</sup> Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 55.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 54. We see similar language in a 1930 essay in which Althaus interacts with the Jewish philosophers Constantin Brunner, Max Brod, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig. Althaus regards these Jews as worthy of being taken seriously in part because they are ‘not ritualistic-orthodox Eastern Jews [*Ostjuden*], but personalities who stand in the midst of the German spiritual world.’ These Jews have embraced the German spirit and are ‘a long way off from modern cultural-Jewry [*modernes Kulturjudentum*].’ See Althaus, ‘Die Frage des Evangeliums,’ 13. Sporn adds: ‘[Althaus] did not entirely exclude the genuine ingrowth [*Hineinwachsen*] of a Jew into the German national identity’ (‘Paul Althaus,’ 9).

existence is governed in part by the elemental ‘law of conflict [*Konfliktgesetz*].’<sup>70</sup>

Each *Volk* is created by God to be *essentially* distinct from every other *Volk*, both in its cultural determination and, more importantly, in its own distinct historical vocation. Each *Volk* is charged to defend its sense of calling, and this involves protecting itself against the influence of other peoples. Hence the ‘dual task for each *Volk* [is] to grasp the particularity and the special mission [*besondere Sendung*] with which it has been entrusted and to hold its ground in defence against all foreign infiltration [*Überfremdung*]. . .’<sup>71</sup>

This schema inevitably results in conflict—indeed violent conflict—between the peoples of the world, as each pursues its unique commission within the same historical space. But in Althaus’ christianised alternative to social Darwinism it is precisely this struggle that drives history forward through the ‘dreadful’ mandates of the ‘law of struggle’ [*Kampfgesetz*] and the competitive ‘law of displacement’ [*Verdrängungsgesetz*], by which one *Volk* may overtake and replace another.<sup>72</sup> Althaus expounds this notion of progress-through-conflict in a Good Friday sermon from the same period:

Wherever blood flows the depths of history come to light. Thus the way of our humanity is marked with blood! No *Volk* can ever achieve greatness and freedom without spilling blood! Blood flows between clans, blood flows between *Volk* and *Volk*, between the parties that struggle for the state, blood flows indeed even between churches.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 63–64.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Kampf,’ in *RGG*, vol. 3, 595–96. To be clear, Althaus is not glorifying conflict *per se*. Conflict is an expression of the wrath of God in judgment against sinful humanity. Nevertheless,

Conflict is a fact and a demand of all natural life. . . . Thus the struggle of the living against death is inescapably a struggle against each other. Despite all of the symbiosis that pervades the natural world, there prevails a terrible law of competitive displacement and a law of conflict, in which every living person must deal and from which no living person can escape. . . . The law of conflict—that no one lives without killing and without being killed—is a result of the wrath of God (595–96).

<sup>73</sup> Althaus, ‘Die Stimme des Blutes’ (18 April 1930), in *Der Gegenwärtige*, 158. He continues: ‘This flowing blood speaks gruesomely of the tragedy, of the awfulness of history, of the fact that apparently in our world of death, there is no life or human movement without opposition, but indeed only through opposition. . . .’

The haze of conflict and competition that envelops human life—what Althaus calls the ‘spirit of Cain’—is a curse, but it is also the means by which God administers creation after the Fall.<sup>74</sup> ‘History,’ he writes in 1932, ‘with all of its constraints—its conflict, death, and so on—is not God’s final will. It is, however, his original will.’<sup>75</sup>

The living nature of history, then, is such that two peoples may be pitted against one another in the pursuit of their respective historical destinies. In this romanticised ‘competition of peoples,’ it is impossible for both peoples to win; these grand questions of historical destiny cannot be decided through the rational adjudication of the Enlightenment, but only through the primal struggle of competition.<sup>76</sup> This is so according to God’s original decree as prescribed in the laws of the orders of creation, which structure human life in its postlapsarian state. Though the final establishment of the Kingdom of God will do away with violence, Althaus does not take this to mean that conflict is a human invention that developed outside of God’s original intent for creation. On the contrary, it is a critical component in God’s administration of creation. On this point, moreover, Althaus is clear that he is not just talking about conventional warfare between nations; rather,

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But the same abundantly flowing blood speaks also of the magnitude, the grandeur, indeed the glory of history.’ This is so because ‘There is nothing noble in human history that did not cost blood—blood, dedication, sacrifice. *Volk* and *Vaterland*, homeland and faith, justice and truth—they’ve all cost blood, and cost blood still’ (158–159). Althaus likewise romanticises human conflict in his 1932 essay ‘Die Gestalt dieser Welt und die Sünde: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der Geschichte,’ *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 9 (1932): ‘History is indeed awful in the antagonism into which it sets men against one another time and again. But this antagonism is a condition of that which makes life in history priceless. . . . History is dreadful wherever it is glorious’ (337). See also Althaus, ‘Krieg II: Krieg und Christentum,’ in *RGG*, vol. 3, 1310, where he uses nearly identical language.

<sup>74</sup> See Paul Althaus, ‘Kain und Christus’ (3 April 1931), in *Der Gegenwärtige*, 54–55.

<sup>75</sup> Althaus, ‘Die Gestalt dieser Welt und die Sünde,’ 335.

<sup>76</sup> Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 64. Compare also Althaus’ comments in 1929:

The races are wandering, and are crowding one another out. The jumbled living situation of the peoples creates difficult ethnic and governmental questions. So the peoples are forced together, on their way to constant confrontation with each other. There is at present wide enough space for peaceful demarcation from each other. But this space has its limits. Questions will arise in which not balance and equality, but only decision is possible. But this decision cannot be sought through the arbitration award of an international forum in every case (‘Krieg II: Krieg und Christentum,’ 1307–08).

the *Konfliktgesetz* applies even in spiritual battles between peoples, where their ‘souls and wills clash.’<sup>77</sup>

As Gerhard Lindemann has illustrated, Protestant churchmen of the Weimar period were waging a ‘war against the Jewish mind.’<sup>78</sup> As a combatant in this war, Althaus saw the rise of Bolshevism in Europe as a key battle in the wider clash between ‘souls and wills.’ Already in 1930, he warned that civil unrest sparked by working-class resentment toward the educated elite was threatening to tear German society apart. The metaphor he uses to diagnose this crisis, significantly, is drawn from the discourse of pathology: class divides are a ‘grave, festering wound’ [*eine schwere, eiternde Wunde*] on the German body.<sup>79</sup> As it happens, Althaus will later describe Jewish presence in Germany as a gaping ‘open wound’ [*offene Wunde*] marring the German body politic.<sup>80</sup> The subtextual linkage of Germany’s socio-financial crisis and the Jews could be incidental, but Althaus developed this connection more explicitly in the mid-1930s. There, he incites Christians in Germany to take up the ‘spiritual fight’ against powers and principalities. In so doing, he implicates Jews with Bolshevism, and names both as demonic powers in the same breath: ‘That [a reference to Ephesians 6:12] means: in this worldwide struggle [*Weltkampf*] against Bolshevism we are not merely dealing with men, we are not merely dealing with the Jews, but with satanic forces.’<sup>81</sup>

Theologically, then, Althaus considers any human attempt to transcend the laws of the orders of creation (and the violent struggle which these laws demand) before God’s eventual ‘abolishment [*Aufhebung*] of nature and history’ a fool’s

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<sup>77</sup> Althaus, ‘Das Vaterland,’ 245.

<sup>78</sup> See Lindemann, ‘Christian Teaching about Jews,’ 43–45.

<sup>79</sup> See Althaus, ‘Die soziale Verpflichtung des Studenten,’ 290–92.

<sup>80</sup> See 91–94 below.

<sup>81</sup> Althaus, ‘Volk ohne Christus?,’ 452.

errand; peaceful coexistence between peoples lies beyond history.<sup>82</sup> Applied to the ‘Jewish Question,’ these fundamental laws of creation take priority over any human legislation. In the face of these ‘ethnic laws of life,’ says Althaus, ‘the Enlightenment [*aufklärerische*] appeal to the concepts of tolerance, equal rights, and universal human dignity makes no sense.’<sup>83</sup> Within the wider logic of Althaus’ theological system, it becomes clear why he rejects the total inclusion of Jews through emancipation and assimilation as a viable solution to the ‘Jewish Question.’ The subtle bleeding of one people into another violates God’s intended design for the *Volk* as an ordinance of creation. Jews and Germans are in competition, each trying to realise its respective potential in history. When Jews disappear into German society, they forget their own distinct vocation as a *Volk* and at the same time threaten Germany’s pursuit of its own glorious historical destiny.

In the end, Althaus rules out the vision of the Enlightenment for its failure to reckon with the intrinsic difference between Germans and Jews, but he also excludes fanatical ‘racial-antisemitism’ [*Rassenantisemitismus*] as a productive way forward.<sup>84</sup> ‘[E]thnic hatred’ against the Jews as a ‘race inferior in themselves’ [*an sich minderwertige*] holds no promise for solving the ‘Jewish Question.’ As many of his apologists have suggested, Althaus does not fully subscribe to the pseudo-scientific racial ideology that would come to define Nazi antisemitism. In fact, within

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<sup>82</sup> See Althaus, ‘Heilsgeschichte und Eschatologie,’ *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 2 (1924):

The life-laws of conflict [*die Lebensgesetze der Widerstreites*], which are at the same time laws of death [*Todesgesetzen*], belong to the essence of nature and history. Whoever hopes that these laws will be replaced through the establishment of the Kingdom of God’s community of love on earth is hoping not for a day in history, but for the abolishment [*Aufhebung*] of nature and history in God’s new world. The world of peace between the peoples is no historical world. The struggle between peoples belongs among the fundamental features of historical life. It is precisely as inseparable from the concept of history as birth and death, as the succession of generations (658).

<sup>83</sup> Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 55.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

three years of the publication of *Leitsätze zur Ethik*, Althaus would come to flatly reject the ‘ideological superstructures’ of National Socialism, including its racial theory.<sup>85</sup> This is in part because he questions the stability of the term *Rasse*—which was by this time circulating in much racist pseudo-science—as a discursive tool to make universal judgments about ethnic groups.<sup>86</sup>

After emphasising the precariousness of *Rasse* as an anthropological concept, Althaus objects to its usefulness on theological grounds.<sup>87</sup> He does point to ‘indisputable spiritual differences’ between the races, but argues that this present ‘racial diversity’ should be regarded as a temporary state that will be abolished at the eschaton.<sup>88</sup> Because members of different races all have their common origin in God’s creative act and will again enjoy fellowship in the coming Kingdom of God, Althaus makes room for ‘all races’ in the church (though the extent of this inclusion is severely limited, as we shall see in due course), a place where there is the ‘possibility of self-understanding and community [*Gemeinschaft*] between alien races in Christ.’<sup>89</sup> Race is thus not a totally static characteristic. Like the orders of

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<sup>85</sup> See Althaus, ‘Gegen den nationalsozialistischen Bazillus,’ *Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 65:3 (1932), 63. For scholarly commentary on Althaus’ attitudes toward racial theory, see Schwarz, ‘Paul Althaus,’ (2013), 143 and Sparr, ‘Paul Althaus,’ 9.

<sup>86</sup> Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 67. A church bulletin from 1931 reports that Althaus had instructed a conference of pastors to guard against the ‘over-estimation of the significance of the race question [*Rassenfrage*]’ when thinking about the relationship between Christianity, the *völkisch* movement, and Judaism. See ‘Evangelische Kirche und völkische Bewegung,’ *Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 64:17 (1931), 403.

<sup>87</sup> Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 67.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. Althaus elaborated earlier in the work:

Christian thought affirms the ethnic segregation [*Besonderung*] of humanity and the particularity [*Eigenart*] of each nationality as grounded in the divine creative will and in the abundance of creation. But the Christian knows at the same time that ethnic separation signifies not only the abundance of history, but also the limits of the organization of the community, as well as its constraints. The eternal Kingdom of God will certainly be preserved for and fulfilled in individuality, but at the same time it will also abolish the barriers between the communities, which are represented in all particularity on earth: the person, the sexual/gendered, the ethnic, and so on (53).

Compare also ‘Vaterlandsliebe,’ in which Althaus states that all ethnic associations are subordinated to the Kingdom of God, ‘into which all peoples have been called’ (1442).

creation, race is a penultimate condition intended to govern human life in the historical sphere. It is not ultimate.

Although Althaus judges *Rasse* a dubious concept, he at the same time distrusts the Enlightenment claim of the fundamental equality of all peoples. A series of statements reveal his firm belief in a hierarchy of races, which are not ranked according to blood or biology, but according to their spiritual and cultural dynamism. Imperialist undertones come through loudly as Althaus repeatedly speaks of the responsibility that more advanced races have toward backward peoples: ‘the cultured peoples [*die Kulturvölker*] have a responsibility to educate and to protect “primitive” peoples [*die primitive Völker*].’<sup>90</sup> It is, of course, part of the German national mission to educate ignorant peoples. Ironically, it is this same felt responsibility to spread German learning and culture that also animates the enterprise of assimilation and acculturation.

Christianisation of primitive peoples, however, is another matter. It almost goes without saying that the simplest—albeit still provisional—solution to the ‘Jewish Question’ would be for the Jews to become Christians. Though Althaus recognises that this solution is not feasible in human history, he nevertheless endorses the work of Christian missions to Jews. The ‘christianisation of the immature races,’ he says, ‘is the cure for ‘social exclusion and opposition.’<sup>91</sup> But while he holds out hope for the conversion of Jews to Christianity, such an outcome remains a religious solution, and an improbable one at that.<sup>92</sup> It is at this point that

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<sup>90</sup> Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 63. Althaus emphasises again: ‘The present situation of racial diversity calls the gifted races [*die begabten Rassen*] to the raising up of the sunken and to the education of the immature’ (67).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 68. See also Ibid., 55.

<sup>92</sup> Althaus contends that the church should not abandon the mission to the Jews [*Judenmission*] even though it has been ‘all but unsuccessful.’ See ‘Mission und Religionsgeschichte,’ *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 5 (1927/28), 561.



Althaus proposes his strategy for dealing with the majority of Jews whose ultimate ‘foreignness’ persists on account of their continued rejection of Jesus.<sup>93</sup>

For Althaus the real threat is not so much the contamination of German blood (though this is a factor), but the corruption of the German way of life by Jewish spirituality. Jews are not to be feared on the basis of their allegedly inferior racial status, but because of the philosophy they represent. He warns:

The danger of Jewry exists above all in the fact that, by virtue of its fate-compelled elective affinity, it has become the chief bearer [*Hauptträger*] of the rational-critical, individualistic spirit of the Enlightenment, and as such a predominate force in the struggle against the historical ties, customs, and traditions of our people.<sup>94</sup>

The Jews, then, are not only aliens, but also agents of alienation. Though Althaus does not elaborate on this claim, it is likely that he is targeting proponents of the ideology of the Jewish Enlightenment.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, a modern constellation of Judaism had created a distinct subculture based on the ideals of the Enlightenment.<sup>95</sup> Encouraged by the egalitarian impulse of secular political thought, many Jews immersed themselves in German culture—especially in the tradition of *Bildung*—in the hopes of attaining equal standing with ethnic Germans. Despite efforts toward total fluency in German language and culture, however, the place of Jews in German society always remained ambiguous. Many Jews ultimately found that they could not become Germans, but only Jews with a ‘bifurcated soul,’ with a foot in each world

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<sup>93</sup> ‘The deepest reason for the alleged ‘foreignness’ [*Fremdheit*] is to be recognised in the form of the external fate of the Jews and the formation of their Jewish spirituality through their rejection of Jesus’ (*Leitsätze*, 54).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> See Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry*, 41–78. See also Jonathan Hess, *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) for a helpful discussion on the ways in which Jews themselves participated in the discourse of modernity and shaped its development.

but belonging totally to neither.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless as more Jews embraced the progressive social and civil vision of the *Haskalah*, the visible distinction between Jews and Germans started to blur. Consequently, emancipation and antisemitism shared a symbiotic relationship—a byproduct of what Shulamit Volkov has called the ‘paradoxes of becoming alike.’<sup>97</sup>

Althaus believed that Jews and Germans had become too much alike. The provisional solution to this paradox, he argues, lies in ‘Jewry’s intensified awareness [*verstärkter Bewußtheit*] of its own unique *Volkstum*, its own special destiny [*Schicksal*], and its own particular situation.’<sup>98</sup> Since the Enlightenment project had foundered, Jews now ought to give up on the illusion of assimilation. Instead, Althaus challenges the Jews to ‘openly profess’ [*sich offen bekennt*] their Jewishness by embracing their distinct historical calling.<sup>99</sup> Ironically, however, his challenge implies the fear that, despite his attestation to the contrary, assimilation *had* worked—at least partially. By 1929, Jews could live wherever they wanted, marry whom they pleased, and pursue any career, including public office. They had effectively become invisible others, and it grew difficult to determine who was a Jew and who was not.

It is not coincidental that elsewhere in the work Althaus argues that respectful human societies should be defined by ‘honesty’ [*Aufrichtigkeit*] and ‘genuineness’ [*Unverstelltheit*].<sup>100</sup> In particular, he exhibits a special preoccupation with openness

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<sup>96</sup> See Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 89–94.

<sup>97</sup> See Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 202–23. Smid has likewise suggested that antisemitism, as a distinctly modern minting of hostility toward Jews, ‘always requires Jewish emancipation as its precondition’ (*Deutscher Protestantismus*, 199).

<sup>98</sup> Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 55.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 36.

of physical self-representation in societal relationships. Althaus' choice of the word *Unverstelltheit* is instructive. In its most literal translation, it can carry the sense of representing oneself 'without disguise' or 'without pretense.' In addition to the baseline level of honesty without which no society can thrive, Althaus is likely also calling for Jews to give up the sham of assimilation and openly embrace their Jewishness in *visibly perceptible* ways.

Althaus' call for Jews to 'come out'<sup>101</sup> and identify themselves hints at his fear and suspicion of assimilated Jews who were now impossible to distinguish from Germans. Only when the Jews openly confess their Jewishness can the appropriate 'boundaries' between Jews and Germans be established. With these boundaries in place, Althaus envisions a 'worthy community' characterised by mutual respect.<sup>102</sup> It is critical to recognise, however, that Althaus does not envision two separate societies for Germans and Jews, but rather clearer demarcation between Germans and Jews in one shared societal space. In other words, the vision is quarantine, not expulsion. The health of German society depends on the ability to determine who is sick and who is not—and then to keep the two separate.

Though contextually moderate, Althaus' prescription—that the Jews embrace their Jewishness and renew their focus on their own particular calling as a people—has dramatic implications because of the undesirable nature of the Jewish vocation. Though, says Althaus, the orders of creation dictate that the world's peoples ought to have remained distinct from each other, they have become jumbled in the unfolding

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<sup>101</sup> The verb construction *sich bekennen*, which I have rendered 'to profess to,' can also carry the meaning of 'to come out of the closet.' As Jon Stratton has shown, this language, translated from the discourse of sexual identity, can also be used to capture the difficulties of identifying oneself as Jewish in the midst of a non-Jewish majority culture. See his *Coming Out Jewish, Constructing Ambivalent Identities* (London: Routledge, 2000). Though it is perhaps anachronistic to assign this meaning to the phrase as Althaus uses it, it does evoke the sense of fear and suspicion that Althaus harboured toward assimilated Jews as invisible others.

<sup>102</sup> Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 55.

of history. In the midst of this ‘muddle of peoples,’ he judges that ‘not every *Volk* finds the possibility of the formation of its own national state.’ While some peoples are privileged to realise the destiny of nationhood, others must bear the ‘difficult fate’ [*schweres Schicksal*] of living as exiles in a foreign state in order to testify to ‘the limits of the national state’s authority.’<sup>103</sup> Althaus describes the Jews’ alleged divine commission in nearly identical terms:

. . . the mystery of the Jewish destiny among and for the peoples has, in the judgment of faith, a serious purpose. The question of this scattered, homeless Jewry [*zerstreuten, heimatlosen Judentums*] exhibits the open question of history in general, reminds us of the limits of ethnic segregation and ethnic national-community [*völkische Geschlossenheit*], and directs our gaze to the coming Kingdom of God.<sup>104</sup>

The Jews’ socio-political purpose and their theological purpose are virtually synonymous.

It is precisely as the ‘scattered, homeless Jewry’ that the Jews fulfill their unenviable national mission as signs of the unresolvability of human history, as free-floating alien bodies that prevent total ethnic homogeneity, and as mysterious portends of the coming of the Kingdom. The resonance with the ancient anti-Jewish libel of the eternally wandering Jew is obvious, especially because Althaus links the Jews’ current disinherited state with their rejection of Jesus.<sup>105</sup> But it is striking to note how Althaus reframes what many Christian theologians have considered as the Jewish ‘curse’ (i.e. their exilic existence among the nations) as the Jewish ‘destiny’ [*Schicksal*].’ More accurately, perhaps, Althaus conflates the concepts of curse and vocation; the curse of the Jews is, paradoxically, also their divine calling. In an ironic and tragic twist, the Jews’ *Schicksal* is both their ‘destiny’ and their ‘fate.’ This

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

scattered and parasitic existence is the Jewish ‘special destiny’ that Althaus expects Germany’s Jews to embrace with an ‘intensified awareness.’

The last word on the ‘Jewish Question’ must still remain one of uncertainty. The mystery of Jewish existence, like the nature of history itself, necessarily abides in a state of ‘unresolvability.’<sup>106</sup> With the understanding that any proposed solution is only provisional, Althaus recommends that Jews simply identify themselves as Jews, embrace their onerous national mission, and remain self-contained in their synagogues within established societal boundaries. This proposal reveals Althaus’ unease with the more radical rhetoric circulating at the time. He rejects the inclusion/exclusion binary represented by the ideologies of emancipation/assimilation and racial exclusion. Instead, Althaus casts a vision of inclusive quarantine in which Jews and Germans exist in dialectical relationship within the same societal space:

The solution to the Jewish Question can be expected neither through the completion of emancipation and assimilation nor through the external or legal expulsion [of the Jews] from the life association [*Lebensverband*] of our state.<sup>107</sup>

Althaus opts for a more-or-less medieval solution to the ‘Jewish Question’ in which Jews dwell on the fringe of all human societies as a perpetually dispossessed and disinherited sign of judgment and as a warning to other peoples with more glorious destinies to fulfill.

## **CONCLUSION | INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION**

As our exposition of these two Weimar treatises has shown, Althaus projects what at first blush appears to be an ambiguous posture toward the ‘Jewish Question.’

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 55.

However, close examination reveals a *dialectical* societal vision for the place of Jews not only in Germany, but among all the peoples the world. Althaus characterises Jewish existence as inherently pathological: Jews—especially assimilated, secular Jews—are contagions who threaten to infect the German spirit and endanger the German destiny. Despite the risk of infection, however, Althaus will not entertain the expulsion of Jews from Germany—or, critically, from any other society—because of the indispensable theological functions that Jews perform. Instead, he suggests that Jews embrace an inclusive quarantine wherein Germans and Jews can share a common society, provided that each *Volk* respects the visibly-identifiable boundaries that divide them. This means that, in the end, the place of Jewish persons is both inside and outside of human communities—both everywhere and nowhere. Althaus develops these themes with greater theological focus in two publications from 1932, to which we now turn.

### CHAPTER III | 'OPEN WOUNDS': THE MYSTERIOUS PURPOSE OF JEWISH EXISTENCE

However we Germans solve [the 'Jewish Question'], one thing will not change: the Jews will remain seated in our country, just as they are among the other peoples of the world.

Paul Althaus, 'Gott und Volk' (1932)

#### INTRODUCTION

Althaus' attitude toward the 'Jewish Question'—in both its socio-political and theological dimensions—was beginning to take its distinct shape by the eve of the great turning point of January 1933. In a pair of publications issued just months before Hitler's rise to power, Althaus picks up and builds upon the themes he had developed in his earlier Weimar writings. The pathological element of Jewish existence remains in force: he continues to depict Jews as dangerous bearers of a diseased spirituality. What becomes clearer here, though, is the mysterious performative significance of Jewish presence not only in Germany, but in all societies. In *Gott und Volk*, Althaus recruits the Jews as a constructive resource for Christian nationalism. The stubborn resilience of this peculiar people, in a paradoxical way, actually prevents the idolisation of the German ethnic identity. He then seeks to exposit the profound theological meaning of the people of Israel in his commentary *Der Brief an die Römer*, where, since the crucifixion, the Jews wander the earth to plague the nations as an 'open wound.' In so doing, they serve as an ominous yet vital portend of the coming Kingdom of God.

#### ONE | THE JEWS AS EXPLODERS OF 'ETHNIC NATIONAL COMMUNITY': *GOTT UND VOLK* (1932)

We again encounter the mediatory character of Althaus' theology in his 1932 essay *Gott und Volk*, wherein he searches for a middle way between two extremes in the relationship between nationalism and Christian faith. By 1932, nationalistic

fervour was reaching its boiling point, and Althaus perceived a danger in two opposite poles of the public debate about the surging *völkisch* movement. On the one hand, the rise of non-Christian *völkisch* ideology, whether in the form of secular nationalism or neo-paganism, threatened to drown out Christian proclamation regarding the relationship between God and the German nation. On the other, Althaus distrusted ‘a truncated concept of theology, indeed of revelation,’ such as that of Karl Barth, which altogether precludes the possibility of divine self-revelation in political and historical events.<sup>1</sup>

In the first place, Althaus always thought of the church as the ‘conscience of the nation’: the organ by which love of *Volk* is tested and purified.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, against the radical elements of the *völkisch* movement, he offers an alternative nationalism that anchors love of nation in Germany’s historic Christian heritage. Against restrictive theologies of revelation, on the other hand, Althaus points to God’s action in the unique historical and political destiny of the *Volk*. The Althausian brand of *Christian* nationalism emerges here: ‘The position toward nationality [*Volkstum*] becomes pagan not only when one sounds a call to a ‘German faith’ [*deutscher Glaube*n] instead of to Christianity, [but also when one] plays with the idea of resurrecting either of a real or a supposed brave ancient-German piety.’<sup>3</sup> For Althaus, the path to German renewal lies not in the revival of Teutonic legend or pagan rites, but in a Christian spirituality that can interpret political events theologically in order to venerate the *Volk* without idolising it.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Gott und Volk,’ in *Die deutsche Stunde der Kirche*, 34.

<sup>2</sup> Kurz, *Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 455–56. Kurz argues that Althaus’ christianised nationalism is one of the defining characteristics of his innovations within the ‘nationalist Protestant’ tradition.

<sup>3</sup> Althaus, ‘Gott und Volk,’ 46.



We have established that, for Althaus, the *Volk* as a God-ordained structure of creation is simply a datum: a static category that must be preserved in human life until its ultimate fulfillment at the eschaton. It is within this imaginative framework that he addresses the question of how the various peoples of the world, not least the Jews, ought to relate to one another in the historical sphere. But Althaus fears that the pressures of modernity are slowly eroding the foundations of the *Volk*:

The reality of the *Volk* and the consciousness of *Volk* and *Volkstum* will remain, as it has previously. Indeed, even consciousness of the *Volk* has its tides. There are tides of forgetfulness and tides of new discovery, tides of healthy unconsciousness [of] the *Volk* and *Volkstum*—and tides where it is necessary to become conscious of the *Volk*'s danger of death [*Todesgefahr des Volkes*]. We stand today in such a situation of new consciousness of the *Volk*. We are thereby not better, not more German than our fathers, who spoke less about *Volk* and *Volkstum* and who indeed never uttered the buzzword '*völkisch*'—we are not better, but more threatened.<sup>4</sup>

But what is this threat that confronts Althaus' Germany with 'danger of death' unlike any other hour in history?

Althaus once again targets *Überfremdung*, the steady encroachment of otherness into German life.<sup>5</sup> He is concerned here with the alienation of the German 'type,' both on German soil and amongst 'German culture abroad [*Auslanddeutschtum*].' As he had in other writings of the Weimar era, he affirms the unique 'common spiritual type' of the German people, which transcends geography and arbitrary national boundaries and manifests in language, culture, poetry, philosophy, art and architecture, law and constitution, and perhaps above all in church life.<sup>6</sup> The *Volk* originates as a basic spiritual entity in Althaus' mysterious

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<sup>4</sup> Althaus, 'Gott und Volk,' 35.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 35–36. See also *Leitsätze*, 53f.

concept of ‘primal generation’ [*Ur-Zeugung*], and is formed through the confluence of factors, of which blood is one:

How does a *Volk* come into being? Natural and historical themes work together: commonness of soil, of blood, of destiny. Living together, blood relationship, the experience of a common destiny in a state work towards the formation of a *Volk*. Here one already sees that blood relationship—what one means today by the concept of ‘race’ [*Rasse*]<sup>7</sup>—is only one of many elements.

The *Volk*, simply put, is partially determined by racial relationships, but is primarily defined in terms of a people’s history, culture, and destiny—all connoted in Althaus’ concept of *Seelentum*, or ‘spiritual vitality.’

At this point, however, Althaus begins to stress that the *Volk*, which God has created and intends to sustain, is a penultimate, and not an ultimate, reality. He basically affirms the *völkisch* impulse, but fears that it has become untethered from Germany’s Christian heritage and, as a result, has elevated the *Volk* over its creator.<sup>8</sup> Because any ideology that refuses to recognise God as the creator and master of the orders of creation (of which the *Volk* is but one) will inevitably degenerate into idolatry, Althaus reminds his readers that ‘all earthly bonds have been “called into question before God.”’<sup>9</sup> It is therefore impossible to speak of an ‘eternal nationality’ because ‘[t]he *Volk* is a creation and just a creation, God-given, but truly not immortal and not divine; it is instead mortal and transient, limited and sinful.’<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>8</sup> ‘*Völkisch* thought has it right in that it knows the experienced bond [between Germans] as “holy.” But it deteriorates into lies and becomes paganism when it only sees the bond and no longer sees the one who binds, who is Lord even over the bond’ (Ibid., 45).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 47. Althaus had spoken of God’s judgment over the *Volk* also in ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ where he warned that love of *Volk* is especially susceptible to demonic distortion: ‘the *völkisch* desire is the will to live—it participates in the savageness and boundlessness of all natural wills to live. It is not exempt from the hex which hangs over all natural desires—the danger of a lapse into the demonic. The noble glow of *Volk* can become a wild, impure fire’ (120).

<sup>10</sup> Althaus, ‘Gott und Volk,’ 47.

Althaus senses a danger in the nationalistic zeal of both secular and neo-pagan *völkisch* movements, which, decoupled from Christian teachings about the meaning and destiny of the nations, could only result in the idolisation of the *Volk*. Only through a christianisation of the *völkisch* movement could Germany expect spiritual and moral renewal:

As [the church] testifies to God the Lord, the Creator, it makes the bond between *Volk* and fatherland more serious and more strong than any *völkisch* mythology, any racial fanaticism can. The church has forfeited its responsibility to defend the dignity of the *völkisch* imperative against all falsification.<sup>11</sup>

Althaus puts it succinctly elsewhere in 1932:

The passionate rallying-cry resounds through our ranks: 'German *Volk*,' 'Nation,' 'Freedom,' 'New Reich,' and elsewhere we hear 'New Society,' 'New Humanity.' We do not want to drown out any of these rallying-cries. The rallying-cry 'Church!' is not in competition with any of the others—but it must be the very first among them.<sup>12</sup>

It is within the context of the Christian revival of Germany that Althaus hints at the symbolic role that the Jews play in his theological imagination. As we have seen, Althaus' apologists take pains to stress that he did not subscribe to *racial* antisemitism. The comments in *Gott und Volk* support that claim. Although he does believe that blood relationship is an important factor in the formation of a *Volk*, it is not the determining factor. Althaus does not indicate explicitly that there is a hierarchy of peoples in which one *Volk* has greater intrinsic value than another. For instance, following Wilhelm Stapel's *Antisemitismus und Antigermanismus* of 1928,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 48. The argument is nearly identical to that of 'Kirche und Volkstum.' Compare also Althaus' comments in 'Vaterlandsliebe (Patriotismus)': 'But before the sight of God, natural patriotism is not only affirmed, but also purified' (1442).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Luthers Wort an die Gegenwart,' *Zeitwende* 8 (1932), 325–26.

Althaus discredits the Nazi ideal of a *pure* racial type.<sup>13</sup> When Althaus does use the language of national type, he is not thinking primarily in racial terms.<sup>14</sup>

While Althaus appears to reject the concept of the racial superiority of the Aryan type, he again demands that the peoples—defined not primarily by blood but by spiritual essence—remain *segregated* from each other according to divine decree. ‘In the ethnic classification of humanity [*die völkische Gliederung der Menschheit*],’ in fact, ‘we recognise God’s creative will.’<sup>15</sup> What is more, the nations are to remain distinct because they are destined to struggle against one another. Pursuant to the ‘dark, terrible law of *Volk* against *Volk*,’ the comingling of peoples is for Althaus forbidden by God: ‘We also do not forget that the origination of a *Volk* comes about through nothing other than conflict and wrathful outward demarcation [*zornige Abgrenzung nach außen*]’ between peoples.<sup>16</sup>

Within this imaginative matrix, Althaus’ fear of Jewish ‘foreign invasion’ comes into focus. Jewish assimilation is thus an unworkable solution to the ‘Jewish Question’ because of Althaus’ fundamental conviction that peoples should remain ‘outwardly’ demarcated from each other. As we have seen, for Althaus a cosmopolitan culture in which one cannot tell who is a Jew and who is not represents a distortion of the orders of creation. Though he may not explicitly fear the contamination of the German type with Jewish blood, he nevertheless fears the spread of the Jewish spirit. This demand for more stringent and more visible

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<sup>13</sup> Althaus quotes Stapel as follows: ‘Like in all structures of life, so also are peoples not separated neatly from each other. One can never say with absolute precision: this one belongs to one, that one to another nature [*Wesen*]. There are individuals “between the peoples”’ (‘Gott und Volk,’ 48).

<sup>14</sup> See *ibid.*, 35–36.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* Compare also Althaus’ handling of the elemental ‘law of conflict’ [*Konfliktgesetz*] in *Leitsätze*, 63–64 and nearly identical language in ‘Volk,’ 5.

delineation between Germans and Jews is consonant with the social vision Althaus already had outlined in 1929's *Leitsätze zur Ethik*.

It is crucial to note, however, that for Althaus *segregation* between peoples does not translate straightforwardly to *expulsion* of peoples from a shared societal space. Applied to the 'Jewish Question,' this means that '[h]owever we Germans solve it, one thing will not change: the Jews will remain seated in our country, just as they are among the other peoples of the world.'<sup>17</sup> Even though Jewish existence represents a danger, it is nevertheless a permanent fixture in every human society. As André Fischer has rightly observed, 'Jewish life in Germany is for Althaus an indisputable fact.'<sup>18</sup>

It is at this point that the 'Jewish Question' actually provides a constructive resource for the christianisation of nationalism. For Althaus the Jews have a special significance for Germans as proof of the limits of ethnic solidarity. In other words, he recruits the Jews as a tool to combat or, to use Althaus' more forceful language, 'blow up/explode' the collectivism which undergirds idolatrous nationalisms: 'It seems to me that their destiny, beyond all of the difficult tasks and hardships that it brings with it, has a clear purpose from God. . .'<sup>19</sup> The purpose of Jewish existence is threefold:

- 1) to 'explode [*sprengen*] the ethnic national community' [*völkische Geschlossenheit*] in human societies everywhere, but 'with particular acuteness' in Germany,

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<sup>17</sup> Althaus, 'Gott und Volk,' 48.

<sup>18</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 517.

<sup>19</sup> Althaus, 'Gott und Volk,' 48.

2) to ‘point to the limits and relativity of ethnic segregation’ [*völkische Sonderung*], and

3) to ‘direct our gaze to the coming Kingdom of God.’<sup>20</sup>

The themes expressed in this passage—the mysterious eschatological function of Jews as signs of God’s judgment over the orders of creation—capture the complexity of Althaus’ theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ during the Weimar period. The Jews, though dangerous, are actually indispensable for his theology of the *Volk*.

Within his christianised *völkisch* nationalism, Althaus thus puts the Jews to work as a ‘thorn, which painfully disturbs gentile self-segregation in national identity.’<sup>21</sup> The Jews, according to God’s design, must remain an unsolvable problem. The expulsion of German Jews, according to the logic of *Gott und Volk*, is a theological impossibility. Jews are indispensable not because they are intrinsically valuable, but because they have been charged with a strange and difficult vocation: to testify to the limits of national achievement in the fallen state of creation. These stubborn Jewish communities, which do not and indeed cannot assimilate into the societies around them, are evidence of the provisional nature of ethnic segregation and of the limitations of the ideal of ethnic national-community. In a paradoxical way, Althaus uses the Jews as a rhetorical device to expose a fatal flaw in secular and pagan ethnic nationalisms: the idolatrous exaltation of the *Volk* above its creator. Within the imaginative framework of *Gott und Volk*, Althaus proposes not that Jews be expelled or assimilated, but quarantined within German communities as an exhibit to prove that no *Volk* stands above its creator.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. The language is nearly identical to *Leitsätze*, 55.

<sup>21</sup> Jörg Baur, ‘Vermittlung in unversöhnten Zeiten: Zum Gedenken an Paul Althaus 1888–1966,’ *Kerygma und Dogma* 34 (1988): 189.

## TWO | THE JEWS AS RIDDLE OF THE COMING KINGDOM: *DER BRIEF AN DIE RÖMER* (1932)

As Stephen Haynes has shown, the predominance of Christian discourse has traditionally interpreted the meaning of Jewish existence within a matrix of the simultaneous reprobation and salvation of Israel. Within this imaginative structure, a negative value is assigned to Jews on account of their rejection of Jesus Christ and a positive value is assigned to Jews because they remain the mysterious people of God who must be preserved.<sup>22</sup> One difficulty with this ‘witness-people’ mythology is that it objectifies Jews as an enigma to be solved. Althaus struggles with this difficulty in his *Der Brief an die Römer* of 1932 as he puzzles over the ‘dark, depressing riddle’ posed by Israel’s existence: ‘The people of salvation history [*Heilsgeschichte*] has become the salvation-less people.’<sup>23</sup>

Althaus’ interpretation of Paul’s exposition of the destiny of the Jews in Romans 9–11 is characterised by his dialectical approach to the nature of Jewish existence. It is true, for instance, that he does emphasise the critical salvation-historical relationship between Israel and the church, Israel’s continuing election by God, and the Jewishness of Jesus, as Fischer has noted.<sup>24</sup> However, as well shall see below, Althaus’ positive assessment of the value of Jewish existence, which is still critical of Judaism but more or less consistent with classical Christian exegesis, is in the end overshadowed by a lapse into chimerical antisemitic diatribes only tangentially related to his comments on the biblical text. Ultimately, Althaus returns to his familiar dialectic of pathology and performance in both his positive and negative judgments about the character of Israel’s existence.

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<sup>22</sup> Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 8–10.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Althaus, *Der Brief an die Römer. Übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1932), 79.

<sup>24</sup> See Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 486–91.

Althaus' ambivalence toward the meaning of Israel is evident in his comments on Romans 9–11. However, one element that remains consistent throughout his analysis is the continuing, though qualified, election [*Erwählung*] of Israel as the people of God. Yet, as we shall see, the concept of 'Israel' has been reconfigured radically into the church. Nonetheless, Althaus praises the religious pedigree of Israel, understood as the people whose history is narrated in the Hebrew Scriptures:

With the patriarchs and with Moses God confirmed and renewed the covenant; the Torah, the Law was given to the *Volk* from God through Moses; likewise, their cultic system, not established by men but instead ordered by God, is exalted over the pagan cultic system; from the patriarchs the *Volk* has received a mark above all others in the promise of the Messiah; at the beginning of Israel's history stand the fathers, who have spoken with God directly, in whose history God has prevailed marvelously—where else is there a history like this?<sup>25</sup>

In contrast to the extremist elements of the *völkisch* movement, which aimed to discount completely Israel's salvation-historical importance, Althaus is unequivocal that God has elected Israel and that a *remnant* of Israel will figure prominently in the eschatological climax of salvation-history. What is more, he affirms that the people of Israel, in terms of historical origins, had also yielded God's Messiah: 'Thus has God loved Israel, that his entire glory dwells in a son of Israel!'<sup>26</sup> This open acknowledgment of the Jewishness of Jesus is significant in a time when Christian theologians would soon search for ways to aryanize him.<sup>27</sup>

Even though the religious history of the people of Israel is critical, says Althaus, the church is now the true 'Israel of God.'<sup>28</sup> Althaus reconfigures Israel as a theological category so that 'bodily descent from the people of Israel does not

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<sup>25</sup> Althaus, *Römer*, 81.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> See Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* and Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Antisemitism*, 531–76.

<sup>28</sup> Althaus, *Römer*, 80.



necessarily mean belonging to the true Israel as the community of the children of God, that is, the church of God.’<sup>29</sup> Here the concept of Israel has been spiritualised in a form of classical supersessionism to which Althaus generally subscribes. In the negative dimension of the dialectic, then, the people of Israel were once the bearers of salvation-history, but have squandered that original vocation. Israel was offered every opportunity for salvation, but instead stubbornly chose their dead religion of works righteousness: ‘Israel imagined wrongly that it could perform righteously before God on the path of the works of the law—which is still impossible—instead of going on the way of faith which has been ordained by God.’ As a result of Israel’s obstinacy, ‘God’s way of salvation has become for Israel a doom [*Verhängnis*] and a curse [*Fluch*] through their unbelief.’<sup>30</sup>

Such an interpretation of Israel’s salvation-history, however, pins Althaus up against the dilemma of Israel’s simultaneous election and reprobation. He resolves this problem by hinting that God can bring his final purposes to fruition *without* the ethnic people of Israel by means of a ‘remnant,’ thereby fulfilling Israel’s election through a small remainder comprised of Christians of Jewish descent. Despite the reality that most of the people of Israel have fallen away from their original divine calling, explains Althaus, ‘[t]here is a “remnant,” a Jewish-Christian community, a survival of the fleshly Israel in the midst of the New Testament people of God.’<sup>31</sup> It

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 82, 87.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 87. Althaus’ discourse conforms to what Charlotte Klein has identified as a preoccupation with an ‘artificial dichotomy between Law and Grace’ common to much German Protestant theology of the age (see *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology*, 146). Klein had earlier made the argument that Judaism was never a ‘religion of works’ and never understood itself to be such. For Klein, the works/grace dichotomy is a Christian invention, and yet another example of how Christian theologians have failed to allow Jews to speak for themselves: ‘In Judaism—oppressive burdens, in the gospel—liberating grace. None of these theologians can get rid of this wrong conception of Judaism’s understanding of the law; the contrast is based on a preconceived judgment which merely needs to be proved. Behind this biased judgment lie ignorance of Judaism as it really is and arbitrary interpretation of texts’ (53).

<sup>31</sup> Althaus, *Römer*, 93.

is Jewish Christians, in addition to Gentiles, who now constitute the true Israel. Israel's lapse is, ironically, the fulfillment of its original salvation-historical function: to bring salvation to the Gentiles.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, the remnant of Israel lives on in the form of Jewish Christians who have joined Gentiles in the church and serve of evidence of God's faithfulness to his promises. As we shall see, this conclusion would prove significant as Althaus wrestled with the question of the place of Christians of Jewish descent in German churches in 1933.

Althaus' exegesis in *Die Briefe an die Römer* leaves this point unclear, and that ambiguity is further complicated by his earlier comments about the on-going salvation-historical significance of the people of Israel in his work *Die letzten Dinge* of 1922. Here Althaus, like he does in his Romans commentary, stresses Israel's 'special and unique place in God's plan of salvation,' which is to serve as the foundation upon which the church, the 'Israel of God,' is built. In Althaus' interpretation, once Israel's salvation-historical objective—i.e., the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God—has been achieved in the ministry of Jesus Christ, it appears that the Jews no longer hold any *direct* salvation-historical significance: 'Israel as the historical people [*das geschichtliche Volk*] is, since Christ, who fulfilled Israel's salvation-historical calling in himself, no longer a theological, "salvation-historical" [*heilsgeschichtliche*] factor.'<sup>33</sup>

In this eschatological system, Althaus does not consider the restoration of the nation of Israel, as a historical entity, necessary in order for secular history to reach its conclusion. To be sure, he muses over whether and how God intends to achieve the final salvation of Israel, but he refuses to dogmatise Israel's ultimate future: ' . . .

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Althaus, *Die letzten Dinge: Lehrbuch der Eschatologie* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1922), 313.

we cannot say whether God will lift the curse from his people yet in our history, as Paul expected, or beyond our history, where not only the last generation of Israel, but all Israel will encounter Christ.’<sup>34</sup> Though his analysis of the continued historical and salvation-historical significance of the historical entity of Israel is characteristically ambivalent, Althaus rejects any form of chiliasm which requires the restoration of Israel for the inauguration of Christ’s millennial reign.<sup>35</sup>

In the end, Althaus does not solve the ‘dark, depressing riddle’ of Jewish existence in his comments on the text of Romans, instead reserving the question of Jewish salvation for eschatological resolution. But his textual commentary, though often antagonistic toward Judaism, does generally exhibit the same tension between Jewish reprobation and preservation evident in classical Christian exegesis.<sup>36</sup> Althaus’ statements about Judaism are certainly often negative, but they are mostly tethered to the biblical text.

However, in a concluding excursus Althaus seeks to connect his interpretation of Romans 9–11 to the contemporary socio-political discourse about the status of Jewish communities in Germany. As we have seen, he does not expect a solution to the ‘Jewish Question’ through political measures like the emancipation

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 314. In his Romans commentary, Althaus writes that ‘Israel’s conversion will be the end of salvation-history. For that reason Israel’s salvation-historical position remains effective for the rest of humanity, with all of the twists and turns of its divine-historical destiny’ (*Römer*, 95). On balance, it appears that Althaus leaves open the possibility that the salvation of Israel is reserved for the far side of earthly history, leaving the question essentially unresolved. Henning Theißen has argued that by the early 1930s, Althaus had already firmly established an eschatology that is ‘anti-apocalyptic’ in nature, in part as a reaction against Jewish eschatology, which he believed connected secular history and eschatology too closely. For Theißen, Althaus’ eschatology maintained an ‘eternity beyond history’ [*Ewigkeit als Jenseits der Geschichte*] rather than a Jewish eschatology of ‘final history.’ See *Die evangelische Eschatologie und das Judentum: Strukturproblem der Konzeptionen seit Schleiermacher* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 208–14. Cf. Althaus, ‘Heilsgeschichte und Eschatologie,’ especially 616–635, and Althaus ‘Eschatologie IV: Christliche, dogmengeschichtlich,’ in *RGG*, vol. 2., 345–53.

<sup>35</sup> ‘The historical-theological postulates that Israel’s earthly history must find its “worthy outcome,” or its “logical conclusion” through an hour of conversion at the end of history have no theological authorisation’ (*Die letzten Dinge*, 314). See also Althaus, ‘Eschatologie V: Religionsphilosophisch und dogmatisch,’ in *RGG*, vol. 2, 353–62 for additional criticisms of chiliasm.

<sup>36</sup> See Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 25–63.

and assimilation of German Jews. Rather, only Christian theology could interpret the meaning of the continued existence of the Jews. At the conclusion of his Romans commentary, Althaus complains that the church has ceded discussion about the ‘Jewish Question’ to the secular world of policy-makers when the question is in its essence a theological question. ‘Christianity itself for a long time has lapsed into the secularisation of the Jewish Question on account of an awareness of the times.’<sup>37</sup> But with his interpretation of Romans 9–11 in *Der Brief an die Römer*, he sees the opportunity to offer a ‘word about Israel’s destiny in our present wrestling with the question of Jewry.’<sup>38</sup> But in the transition from biblical text to social commentary, Althaus reverts to chimerical discourse in the form of antisemitic libels and anti-Judaic clichés.

In the first place, Althaus suggests that Israel’s destiny has been forever altered by its confrontation with Jesus Christ. ‘In Israel’s history with God,’ he writes, ‘its encounter with Christ was the decisive hour. Israel’s fate [*Schicksal*], both inward and outward, is sealed decisively through its rejection of Jesus.’<sup>39</sup> Though there are echoes of the charge, Althaus does not quite accuse the Jews of deicide. However, already in his 1930 Good Friday sermon, ‘Die Stimme des Blutes,’ Althaus had linked the plight of the Jews to their role in the crucifixion:

The blood of Christ now speaks; even now it cries out. Against whom does it testify? Certainly it testifies first against the people out of whom Christ came and whom he served; certainly it testifies first against the stony hardness and wicked indecisiveness of the people to whom God had turned unlike he had to any other.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Althaus, *Römer*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 100–01.

<sup>40</sup> Althaus, ‘Die Stimme des Blutes,’ 162–63. It must be made absolutely clear that Althaus does not hold the Jews *solely* responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. He is unequivocal that all of humanity stands guilty for the murder of Jesus, asking rhetorically ‘And yet, who among us would have the right to point the finger [at the Jews]: “You were there!” Who could listen to the voice of the blood of Christ as an innocent bystander?’ (163). In his Good Friday sermon from 1932, Althaus warns, ‘We cannot simply wash our hands in innocence as

As a result of their rejection of Jesus, the Jews are under a curse: ‘Until the end of history, the terrible words of an unknowing premonition hang over Israel like a thunderstorm: “His blood be on us and on our children!”’<sup>41</sup>

Significantly, it is *on* Christ, but not *by* Christ, that Israel is ruined: ‘Israel is shipwrecked [*gescheitert*] on Christ.’<sup>42</sup> Althaus’ radical re-orientation of the purpose of Jewish existence now comes into view. The crucifixion is the pivotal moment in which *Israel*—conceived as the salvation-historical entity with a critical history with God—becomes *the Jews*—the present-day ethnic population with no direct salvation-historical significance. The failure to recognise Jesus as God’s Messiah signals the end of Israel’s direct role in the drama of salvation history. Since the crucifixion, one can now speak of ‘the eternal Jew’ [*der ewige Jude*], who ‘originated when Israel made up its mind against Christ’ and is now destined to roam the earth disrupting the peace of others because he himself can find no peace.<sup>43</sup>

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if the Jews were alone. Alas not. The same spirit that brought Jesus to the cross is living even in us. Not just Jewish blood, but the blood of all humanity revolts against him’ (Althaus, ‘Kain und Christus,’ 57). In his academic writings, he considers the cross as a moment of God’s wrath over all human persons, as the ‘holy “No” to all of humanity.’ See Althaus, ‘Das Kreuz Christi als Maßstab aller Religion,’ in *Evangelium und Leben*, 74. Althaus almost completely passes over the unique culpability of the Jews in his most concerted academic treatment of the theology of the cross, apart from a brief reference to God’s wrath against those who were ‘mistaken about his Son.’ This wrath is revealed against ‘not just the crowd, the fickle mass of people, but against the man in charge of it—the Pharisee, the theologian, the priest, the scribe of the Law of God and the holy traditions.’ However, this brief reference is set within the wider context of God’s wrath against the sinfulness of all of humanity as revealed at the crucifixion. See *Das Kreuz Christi* (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1922), 18. While Althaus does recognise the universal guilt of humankind for the crucifixion of Jesus, he nevertheless argues that the guilt of the Jews is given priority because they were the objects of God’s special efforts. Thus in ‘Die Stimme des Blutes,’ the spilt blood of Christ testifies against the Jews ‘first.’

<sup>41</sup> Althaus, ‘Die Stimme des Blutes,’ 163.

<sup>42</sup> Althaus, *Römer*, 101. Cf. Althaus’ sermon, ‘Die Herrlichkeit in der Passion’ (25 February 1923), in *Der Lebendige*, where he states that, as a result of the Jews’ ‘No,’ Jesus ‘shuts the door that he had opened to them.’ Following this failed encounter, the Jews are now ‘shipwrecked’ or ‘sundered in two’ [*zerscheitern*] on Christ (146).

<sup>43</sup> Althaus, *Römer*, 101. Smid has noted that the crucifixion is the ‘birth-hour of the “eternal Jew”’ in Althaus’ thought (see *Deutscher Protestantismus*, 285). In this passage, Althaus is relying directly on several antisemitic texts as evidence for his claims, including Hans Blüher’s *Die Erhebung Israels gegen die christlichen Güter* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1931), Max Wundt’s *Der ewige Jude* (1926) and *Deutsche Weltanschauung. Grundzüge völkischen Denkens* (1926), and Franz Werfel’s *Paulus unter den Juden* (Berlin: Zsolnay, 1926).

This rhetoric implies that Jewish existence is not only destructive but also parasitic, sapping the spiritual vitality of the societies to which it is attached like a wound that will not mend:

This scattered, homeless people that everywhere explodes [*sprengt*] the ethnic national-community [*völkische Geschlossenheit*] of their host-peoples [*Wirtvölker*], and which in many cases represents an open wound [*offene Wunde*], embodies the open question of history in general, reminds the peoples of the limits of their ethnic national-community and of the provisional nature of their segregation [*Sonderung*] and directs their gaze to the coming Kingdom of God.<sup>44</sup>

Althaus' framing of Jewish existence in the language of pathology is not, however, merely a lapse into some kind of cultural antisemitism, but the expression of a deliberate theological grammar. Althaus here conceives of the Jews as an eschatological sign, as a living symbol to remind Germans that their ethnic national community—the echoes of the growing national concern with the purity of blood are clear—can only be provisional this side of the Kingdom of God. The continued existence of the Jews, in other words, is in part a sign of God's judgment on the *Volk* as a penultimate, and not an ultimate, reality. By plaguing the national body as an 'open wound' that will not heal, the Jews warn the nations of the consequences of 'self-assertion' against God.<sup>45</sup>

Though the Jews are no longer the bearers of salvation history, they nevertheless retain an important theological purpose. Still, in a doctrinal formulation original to Althaus, the Jewish *Volk* assumes a critical divine mission: '[t]o transcend the hegemony of peoples in view of the Kingdom of God.'<sup>46</sup> In the end, although they have been replaced by the church as the prime vehicles of God's salvific action,

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<sup>44</sup> Althaus, *Römer*, 101.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Fischer suggests that this grotesque image is a *hapax legomenon* in Althaus' thought (*Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 494–95), but I will show that this is not the last time Althaus will speak of Jews in pathological language.

<sup>46</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 502.

Jewish persons retain a critical, if indirect, theological vocation—even while they, like an open wound, threaten to infect an otherwise healthy body.

The dialectical logic of pathology and performance, as it manifests in his *Romans* commentary, leaves Althaus without the resources affirm the salvation-historical importance of Israel without problematising the continued existence of Jewish communities as a riddle. His comments about Israel and the Jews (who appear as two distinct entities: one theological and one ethnic) meander between critiques of Judaism that derive from classical Christian exegesis and antisemitic libels to such an extent that any rhetorical distinction between theological anti-Judaism and antisemitism ultimately collapses. Althaus would continue to puzzle over the mystery of Jewish existence for years, but one thing remains constant throughout his rhetoric: Jews are not simply Jews, but ominous signs.

## **CONCLUSION | PATHOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE**

The four treatises in which Althaus addresses the ‘Jewish Question’ explicitly provide us with a useful framework for evaluating his assumptions about the character and purpose of Jewish existence during the Weimar years. Across these four pieces, Althaus offers a depiction of Jews and Judaism that appears merely ambiguous, or even contradictory, on the surface but is in fact animated by a dialectical theological logic. The Jews occupy a precarious but critical space in Althaus’ broader theological system, fulfilling both socio-political and theological functions. Before we examine how these ideas developed alongside the increasing disenfranchisement of actual Jewish persons under National Socialism, we will summarise the dialectic of pathology and performance as expressed in the Weimar writings. The basic logic of Althaus’ theology of the Jews can be outlined as follows:

1) Jewish existence is *pathological*. Jewish persons are a danger to their surrounding communities, especially the German *Volk*. Althaus' confronts the 'Jewish Question' within his particularly militant permutation of the Lutheran doctrine of the orders of creation. The *Volk* is an order of creation founded and sustained by God's will. Accordingly, God's intention for the relationship between peoples is expressed in the elemental 'laws of life.'<sup>47</sup> These laws of life demand the 'ethnic classification of humanity,' dictating that the peoples of the earth are to be outwardly segregated from each other.<sup>48</sup> They are to compete with each other for the realisation of their unique national destiny. Althaus therefore rejects the total inclusion of Jews as represented by the Enlightenment ideology of emancipation and assimilation. Jews violate the elemental orders of creation when they hide their Jewishness and pose as Germans. One *Volk* cannot become another. By framing them as a corrosive and disintegrating threat to the world's order and structure, Althaus portrays the Jews as agents of anti-creation.

Moreover, the Jews appear as a force that threatens to thwart German self-determination and, as such, as a necessary foil against which Germans must concentrate their spiritual vitality to actualise their own destiny. Althaus further abstracts the Jews into a polemical trope to symbolise secular rationalism, individualism, and urbanism. Their 'big city spirituality' threatens to unravel the Christian morality of Germany and prevent the realisation of the German destiny by sapping its spiritual

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<sup>47</sup> See Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 63–64.

<sup>48</sup> See Althaus, 'Vaterlandsliebe,' 1442.



strength. Moreover, the threat posed by German Jewry is intelligible only when we grasp Althaus' vision for a re-christianised Germany, populated by a community of priests. Jewish persons are a danger because they bear a foreign spirituality that is lethal to the German type.

- 2) Jewish existence is *performative*. Despite of the curse that characterises their existence, the Jews nevertheless still have a critical mission to fulfill in all communities. The Jewish destiny has been sealed and re-oriented in the Jews' decisive encounter with Jesus of Nazareth, whom they failed to recognise as God's Messiah. The people of *Israel* have become *the Jews* at the crucifixion, and now exist within the dialectic of election and curse. The historical people of Israel has been replaced by the church—'the true Israel of God'—which also contains a remnant of Jewish Christians.

Having failed their original salvation-historical vocation, the people of Israel—whom Althaus had once described as 'the pinball [*Spielball*] among the great peoples of the world'<sup>49</sup>—have now been re-commissioned wander the earth as disrupters of the peace of socio-political communities and omens of theological judgment. As necessary signs of divine truths, the Jews must not be totally excluded from surrounding communities.

- 3) Jewish persons fulfill constructive symbolic functions in the *socio-political* sphere. The Jews' 'peculiar self-assertion' [*einzigartige Behauptung*] as a *Volk* in public life serves as painful evidence of the limits of ethnic national-community.<sup>50</sup> Confined as visible symbols on the

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<sup>49</sup> Althaus, 'Die schwerer Zeit im Lichte der Ewigkeit' (28 June 1931), in *Der Gegenwärtige*, 64.

<sup>50</sup> Althaus, *Römer*, 101. Compare also Althaus, *Die letzten Dinge*, 314.

margin of society, the Jews actually stand as a reminder that the *Volk*, however healthy and powerful it may be, will never achieve full ethnic solidarity, purity of blood, or total authority. In the same way, the Jews testify to the limits of the state's secular authority and represent the unresolvability of human history. Because Jews and Germans share a dialectical relationship, Althaus considers this performative dimension of Jewish existence particularly important for German self-understanding.

- 4) The Jews also enact an indispensable symbolic function in the *theological* sphere. Contrary to the conclusions of scholars who assert that Althaus' anti-Judaism is incidental to his theology,<sup>51</sup> these writings indicate that Jews perform an integral role in his theology of the orders of creation. Althaus shares the predominate assumptions of the 'witness people' mythology, which interprets the Jews as 'important signs' of God's judgment and the promise of the culmination of salvation history.<sup>52</sup> However, he modifies this mythology to exclude the necessity of ethnic Jews to induce the climax of salvation history while also expanding it to include what André Fischer has called the 'indirect eschatological significance' of the Jewish *Volk*.<sup>53</sup>

By living out their precarious existence in the midst of all human societies, the Jews testify that the *Volk*, though it is a gift given by God to govern life in the historical sphere, will ultimately be transcended in the Kingdom of God. By preventing total ethnic homogeneity, Jews remind

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<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, Knitter's thesis in 'Die Uroffenbarungslehre.' Compare also Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 118f.

<sup>52</sup> See Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 12–13.

<sup>53</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 500.

Christians that their ultimate allegiance should be not to the orders of creation themselves, but to the God who stands over the orders. Though divested of their original vocation, Jews still exercise a critical prophetic function by confronting their host societies as a living safeguard against the idolisation of the *Volk*. In both the socio-political and the theological spheres, the Jews must remain *visible* to fulfill their symbolic performative function.

To summarise: in both the socio-political and the theological spheres, the Jews must remain both *inside and outside, a part of and apart from* surrounding human communities to fulfill their purpose as a *Volk*. On a societal scale, the relationship between Jews and Germans is dialectical, and thus can be characterised neither by total exclusion nor total inclusion. Instead, Althaus projects an *inclusive quarantine model* in which Jewish danger is to be contained within but not eliminated from surrounding human societies. Though Althaus fears the Jews, they must nevertheless be preserved—and, critically, preserved as outwardly identifiable communities physically distinguishable from German communities—not because of the expectation of their role in the consummation of salvation history, but because of the ominous truths they signify. For Althaus, then, the Jews are a necessary danger: his system needs the Jews, diseased though they are.

As an aside, here it is perhaps illustrative to note how Althaus elsewhere handles other forms of ‘broken life’ [*das gebrochene Leben*]: incompetent, pathological lives that are a drain on, rather than a benefit to, society. For Althaus, these ‘unproductive’ persons—invalids, the mentally or physically incapacitated, or the hereditarily diseased—are nevertheless crucial members of society because their mere existence reveals the limits of cultural achievement and thereby holds national

arrogance in check.<sup>54</sup> This example of the parallel application of the dialectic of pathology and performance in a different context is instructive for our understanding of how Althaus understands Jewish existence (also pathological and parasitic) to function.

In spanning this dialectic between pathology and performance, the Weimar writings also witness to ‘the blurred lines between religiously and theologically motivated anti-Judaism and ideologically motivated *völkisch* antisemitism.’<sup>55</sup>

Althaus’ Weimar rhetoric, if not always antisemitic, is usually xenophobic.

‘Xenophobes,’ explains Gavin Langmuir, ‘are not talking about real people but about something much more intangible, their sense of danger, of chaos.’<sup>56</sup> In each treatise, Althaus abstracts the Jews into symbols of a larger spiritual and societal threat—agents of chaos who subvert the orders of creation. But because of the dialectical relationship between Jews and Germans, the Jews cannot be conceived absolutely as an enemy of the German *Volk*.

As I have shown, Althaus ultimately rejects as proposed solutions both the total emancipation and assimilation of the Jews *and* the forced expulsion of Jews from German territories. Instead, the Jews must openly identify themselves and embrace a quarantined existence on the margins of German life. Althaus’ remedy for

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<sup>54</sup> See Paul Althaus, *Eugenik im Lichte christlichen Glaubens* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1933), 17–18. Aly has argued persuasively that more attention should be paid to the connection between the Nazi state’s euthanasia and forced sterilisation programmes and the extermination of Europe’s Jews. Euthanasia, suggests Aly, functioned as ‘an act of self-conditioning’ designed to acclimate Germans to the idea of destroying ‘dead weight’ before attempting the wholesale destruction of the Jews (see *Why the Germans?*, 211–18). The fact that Althaus insists on the vital theological importance of ‘unproductive’ groups—including both the incapacitated and the Jews—shows a great deal of distance from the Nazi worldview, even if Althaus agreed with other elements of the Party’s platform.

<sup>55</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 495.

<sup>56</sup> See Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, 331. Wolfgang Gerlach has argued that terms such as *Überfremdung* ‘were not so much descriptions as a form of incitement.’ Gerlach identifies here the common use of Jews as rhetorical devices in nationalistic literature of which Althaus’ Weimar writings are representative. See *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, trans. and ed. Victoria Barnett (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 3.

chaos is order: the ability to identify and contain Jews and therefore curtail the danger they pose.<sup>57</sup> In both in the socio-political and theological spheres, the Jews must remain *visible yet quarantined* to fulfill their symbolic function. If the Jews disappear, whether by assimilation or by expulsion, they lose their critical performative power and fail to fulfill their divine destiny as a *Volk*

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<sup>57</sup> Langmuir has argued that a prime feature of xenophobic rhetoric is the felt need of members of the ingroup to be able to physically identify the members of the outgroup. See *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, 339.



MOVEMENT II: AT THE CHURCH'S 'GERMAN HOUR': GERMANS, JEWS, AND  
ECCLESIAL SPACE UNDER NATIONAL SOCIALISM (1933–1945)

**SECTION II INTRODUCTION | PATHOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE IN MICROCOSM**

In the years prior to the National Socialist *Machtergreifung*, Althaus had addressed the 'Jewish Question' in the terms of what I have called the dialectic of pathology and performance. According to this framework, Jewish persons threaten to infect their surrounding communities with a moral and spiritual sickness while at the same time performing vital theological functions for those same communities. In the Weimar period, Althaus lamented that *Überfremdung* had made the Germany body diseased. In November of 1932, he was still searching for a cure:

The *Reich* of the Germans, toward which we are pushing, should certainly be a political reality, but at the same time it should be much more than that: a rebirth of the German *Volk*, of the German man out of the sources of his own *Volkstum*, a new time of 'salvation,' of renewed health for the whole body of the *Volk* [*neue Gesundheit des ganzen Volksleibes*], the overcoming of the social crisis brought on by capitalism, a new unity of the *Volk*—a new culture, a new worldview, and most of all, a church for all Germans.<sup>1</sup>

Althaus saw potential for a remedy in the events of January 1933. The new National Socialist government, he hoped, would provide a path toward 'convalescence' out of the deadly 'sickness' [*Erkrankung*] ailing the German spirit.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, Althaus was prepared to accept the beginning stages of Nazism's *Judenpolitik*, even if only tacitly. As the regime began to enact concrete measures to disenfranchise the Jews, Althaus would translate his dialectical societal vision into the ecclesial sphere. In so doing, he would continue to reject the inclusion/exclusion binary—this time represented by the conflicting theologies of the *Bekennende Kirche* and *Deutsche Christen*—throughout the National Socialist years. Instead, Althaus

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Das Reich,' *Glaube und Volk* 1:11 (1932), 163.

<sup>2</sup> Althaus, 'Das Ja der Kirche zur deutschen Wende,' 6.

offers a narrative of Jewish existence in which the Jews, through both their very existence and their scriptures, simultaneously endanger and empower German self-understanding. Against the backdrop of his Weimar writings, the dialectic of pathology and performance comes to acute expression in the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph*, to which we turn now.

There are nuances of the *Opinion* that are difficult to detect without a careful analysis within the context of Althaus' broader theology of the 'Jewish Question.' To accommodate the breadth and detail of the argument, the second section traces Althaus' response to the 'Jewish Question' during the National Socialist years across two chapters, which are meant to be read together as a single unit. In chapter four I set both Althaus and his controversial pronouncements—the *Erlangen Opinion* and the *Ansbach Memorandum*—into the wider context of the *Kirchenkampf*. After expositing the documents' fundamental assumptions about the relationship between church and *Volk*, I move in chapter five to a detailed argument regarding the precise nature Althaus' interpretation of Jewish existence as expressed in the *Erlangen Opinion* (and as supported by the suppositions of the *Ansbach Memorandum*). As I suggest below, the document projects in microcosm the same dialectical vision of the Jews that Althaus had developed during the Weimar years, namely: an inclusive quarantine.



## CHAPTER IV | *VOLK BEFORE CHURCH: THE ERLANGEN OPINION ON THE ARYAN PARAGRAPH AND THE ANSBACH MEMORANDUM*

For us Lutherans, the ordinance of the church is always partially determined by the ordinance of the *Volk*, into which the church enters, as well as by political realities (to which political convictions may also belong).

Paul Althaus, ‘Bedenken zur “Theologischen Erklärung” der Barmer Bekenntnissynode’ (1934)

### INTRODUCTION

In many ways, Althaus seems out of place in the turbulent years of the late Weimar Republic. His mediatory personality proved ill-suited to cope with an era of sharp distinctions and intractable oppositions.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, it is difficult to situate Althaus (or his writings) into the polarising matrix of the *Kirchenkampf*. But it is precisely this point that makes the study of Althaus so critical. Althaus’ brand of confessional Lutheranism emerges as a third voice between the *Deutsche Christen* (‘German Christian Movement’) and the *Bekennende Kirche* (‘Confessing Church’)—both of whom drew his criticism, though on drastically different grounds. Likewise, the two theological pronouncements for which Althaus’ contributions were instrumental—the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph* and the *Ansbach Memorandum*—highlight critical questions of Christian ethics under the Third Reich. Below, I uncover what I argue is the decisive characteristic of the ethical framework out of which Althaus’ recommendation for the place of Jews in the DEK would grow: the subordination of the church to the *Volk* within his doctrine of the orders of creation.

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<sup>3</sup> An insight noted by several Althaus interpreters, including Paul Hinlicky (*Before Auschwitz*, 177f.) and Jack Forstman (*Christian Faith*, 198–99).

## ONE | ALTHAUS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE *KIRCHENKAMPF*

Althaus was by no means the only Protestant theologian to receive its news with optimism, but the National Socialist seizure of power did radically alter the landscape of German church life. As a result, discourse regarding Protestant reactions to National Socialism has traditionally been organised around the *Kirchenkampf*—the polarity between the *Deutsche Christen* and the *Bekennende Kirche*—as a struggle for control of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*.<sup>4</sup> However, the last generation of scholarship has exposed the blurred lines between the two groups by demonstrating how muddled Christian attitudes toward National Socialism, and National Socialist attitudes toward Christianity, often were.<sup>5</sup>

Althaus himself serves as a prime illustration of this ambiguity, as his political attitudes drew suspicion, or sometimes outright condemnation, from Christian spectators abroad. Reformed thinkers in Switzerland, for example, classified Althaus and Göttingen theologian Emanuel Hirsch (1888–1972) among the ‘droves of theologians in Protestant Germany’ who had been infected with the ‘bacillus of National Socialist radicalism.’<sup>6</sup> When the Swiss press invited Althaus to

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of the politics of the *Kirchenkampf*, see Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich* and Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, especially chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>5</sup> For the better part of a generation after the Second World War, the narrative crafted by surviving members of the Confessing Church, in which the church was seen as a valiant opponent of National Socialism, predominated in discourse on the *Kirchenkampf*. That the German churches were in genuine peril of being eliminated by the Nazi regime became the standard position, expressed most prominently in John Conway’s *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933–1945*: ‘there is evidence to show that the often-proclaimed determination to wipe out Christianity altogether would have been extended beyond the Warthegau to the other areas of German-held territory, and would have ended in the persecution of Christians by the same methods as had so effectively “dealt with” the Jews’ (331). This view has been challenged forcefully by Richard Steigmann-Gall in *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), wherein Steigmann-Gall argues that many of the Nazi leadership considered Nazism a Christian movement and had no designs on eradicating the church. Moreover, following a reprinting of Friedrich Baumgärtel’s *Wider die Kirchenkampf-Legenden* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund Verlag) in 1958, subsequent generations of scholarship have challenged the prevailing assumption that the churches resisted National Socialism and indeed has identified many places where the churches were actually complicit with the regime. For a thorough survey of recent historiography of the *Kirchenkampf*, see Ericksen and Heschel, ‘The German Churches and the Holocaust.’

<sup>6</sup> The *Reformierte Schweizer Zeitung* had criticised Althaus and Hirsch for a controversial declaration they published at the end of 1931. Althaus and Hirsch discouraged German churches from cooperating in post-war rapprochement with the victorious powers of World War I, whose ‘murderous politics,’ they thought, was

respond to these accusations, he took the opportunity to clarify his position to the burgeoning Nazi movement. While he understood the party's appeal, applauded its rediscovery of German pride and patriotism, and certainly preferred it to liberal alternatives, he was not prepared to offer his uncritical endorsement:

First of all, I can divulge to the Press Service that neither Hirsch nor I belong to the National Sociality Party. As far as it concerns me, what keeps me from joining the party is, on the one hand, objections of a practical-political sort and, on the other (and this is the main thing), the naturalist racial ideology in the 'worldview' of this party.<sup>7</sup>

The *Deutsche Christen*, however, had no qualms with the party's racial theory; by the end of 1941, they had called for the total exclusion of Christians of Jewish descent from German churches.<sup>8</sup> Under the leadership of pastors Siegfried Leffler and Julius Leutheuser—both Nazi party members who studied at Erlangen<sup>9</sup>—the movement eventually gained a stronghold in Thuringia. The *Deutsche Christen* embraced Nazi 'integration' [*Gleichschaltung*]<sup>10</sup>—complete with an effort to de Judaize the Christian faith and create a dogma-less church defined by antisemitism, jingoism, and chauvinism.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the *Bekennende Kirche*, headlined by Swiss theologian Karl Barth, protested to governmental interference in ecclesial affairs.

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threatening the German destiny. See 'Evangelische Kirche und Völkerverständigung: Eine Erklärung,' *Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 64:23 (1931).

<sup>7</sup> See Althaus, 'Gegen den Nationalsozialistischen Bazillus,' 63.

<sup>8</sup> The leadership of the *Deutsche Christen* issued a manifesto, 'Bekanntmachung über die kirchliche Stellung evangelischer Juden,' on 17 December 1941, which read in part:

A German Protestant church must cultivate and nurture the religious life of its German comrades. Christians who are racially Jewish [*Rassejüdische Christen*] have no place and no right in this church. The undersigned German Protestant churches and church leaders have therefore abolished fellowship [*Gemeinschaft*] of any kind with Jewish Christians. The undersigned are determined to tolerate not even the slightest influence of the Jewish spirit on German religious and church life.

Quoted in Gerhard Lindemann, 'Antijudaismus und Antisemitismus in den evangelischen Landeskirchen während der NS-Zeit,' *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 29:4 (2003), 584.

<sup>9</sup> So reports Green in *Lutherans Against Hitler*, at 45. Despite this connection, Oberdheid writes in 1936: 'Leffler and Leutheuser buy into the National Socialist struggle. They are National Socialists in heart and soul. Althaus is not.' Heinrich Oberdheid, *Unpolitisches deutsches Christentum: Ein Wort über das 'Politische Christentum' des Professors Paul Althaus* (Bonn, 1936), 29. Quoted in Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 698.

<sup>10</sup> On the *Deutsche Christen*, see Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

When the new state introduced legislation designed to control the appointment of Protestant pastors, the *Bekennende Kirche* responded with the *Barmen Declaration*, whose objective was to protect the ecclesiastical sphere from Nazi infringement.<sup>11</sup> While this intra-ecclesial debate raged, the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung* (German Faith Movement) gained traction in German political life with its emphasis on the recovery of German mysticism, Teutonic legend, and neo-paganism.<sup>12</sup>

Because of the mediatory character of his theology, Althaus does not fit easily within the *Deutsche Christen/Bekennende Kirche* binary matrix. He was connected briefly to the conservative *Christliche-Deutsche Bewegung* (Christian German Movement), which had no particular party affiliation and collapsed in the summer of 1933, but he never belonged to the *Deutsche Christen*.<sup>13</sup> Although he shared their nationalistic and *völkisch* sympathies, Althaus rejected the total dejudaizing of the Christian faith advocated by the movement and attacked its theological underpinnings in a 1935 article.<sup>14</sup> According to Fischer, Althaus believed the *Deutsche Christen* represented a ‘pseudo-Christianity’ just as dangerous to the Christian faith as the neo-paganism of the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung* espoused by some Nazi ideologues.<sup>15</sup> Not only that, he saw the *Deutsche Christen* as little better than thugs brandishing what he called *SA-Christentum*: an ‘offensive’ distortion of the Christian faith in which ‘the conduct of the SA-Man [is placed] right next to Christian conduct . . . and indeed virtually equated with it.’<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For the context of the *Barmen Declaration*, see Arthur Cochrane, *The Church's Confession under Hitler*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> See George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: The Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Klaus Scholder, no ally of Althaus, reports: ‘Elert and Althaus were no German Christians.’ Quoted in Green, *The Erlangen School*, 277.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Politisches Christentum: Ein Wort über die Thüringer ‘Deutsche Christen,’ *Theologia Militans* 5:5 (1935), 4–32.

<sup>15</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 604–05. Cf. Althaus, ‘Politisches Christentum.’

<sup>16</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Volks-Erlebnis und Offenbarung,’ in *Die deutsche Stunde der Kirche*, 8–9.

Even though he supported some of the aims of both the early National Socialist state and the *Deutsche Christen*, then, Althaus always stressed a moderate vision of German renewal rooted squarely in an uncompromising Lutheran orthodoxy. In fact, one prominent commentator reads Althaus' controversial tract, *Die Deutsche Stunde der Kirche* (1934), as an effort to persuade moderate members of the *Deutsche Christen* away from the radical leadership of Joachim Hossenfelder to his own alternative national-ecclesial vision.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, in 1936 Althaus co-authored a theological statement to distance himself publically from the *Deutsche Christen* movement and to correct its many errors.<sup>18</sup> In the political sphere, Althaus also resisted vehemently the National Socialist government's efforts to subsume the Lutheran churches into a *Reichskirche* under the leadership of *Reichsbischof* Ludwig Müller.<sup>19</sup>

Althaus shared this opposition to Nazi *Gleichschaltung* with the *Bekennende Kirche*; however, he quarreled with the movement on doctrinal grounds. Because of his signature doctrine of *Uroffenbarung*, Althaus' theology has been characterised as fundamentally anti-Barthian.<sup>20</sup> His 1921 work *Religiöser Sozialismus* targeted the religious socialism of the new dialectical theologians. This drew a response from Barth, who questioned whether Althaus' ethical system had the capacity to criticise

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<sup>17</sup> See Jasper, *Paul Althaus*, 233–38.

<sup>18</sup> 'Theologisches Gutachten über die Thüringer Richtung der Deutschen Christen,' *Junge Kirche* 4:14 (1936): 674–75. Althaus' co-authors include Friedrich Brunstäd, Rudolf Bultmann, Werner Elert, Friedrich Gogarten, and Friedrich Karl Schumann.

<sup>19</sup> See 'Erklärung aus der lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands zur Berliner Synod der DEK am 9. August 1934,' *Lutherische Kirche* 16:11 (1934), 187–88. See also 'Erklärung von Mitgliedern der theologischen Fakultät Erlangen zur Gesamtlage der lutherischen Kirche in Deutschland,' *Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 67:38 (1934), 897–98. For more on Althaus' attacks on the *Deutsche Christen*, see Tafilowski, 'Exploring the Legacy,' 71–74.

<sup>20</sup> For a summary of Althaus' dispute with Barth, as well as a useful discussion of Althaus' place in the theological milieu of the twentieth century, see Forstman, *Christian Faith*, especially 121–30.

an unjust government.<sup>21</sup> Althaus answered in turn with ‘Theologie und Geschichte’ (1923), in which he decried Barth’s ‘debasement of history’—that is, his refusal to recognise God’s self-revelation in the historical sphere.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the debate, Althaus puzzled over Barth’s narrow view of revelation. More than that, he blamed Barth’s theological method for the immense popular appeal of the pseudo-Christian theology of the *Deutsche Christen*:

Our Protestant fathers had a doctrine of the *vocatio generalis*, of a universal call that God issues to humanity through their own reality and the reality of the world. In recent theology, with its purely christological doctrine of revelation, one no longer knows anything about that. . . . No wonder, then, that this truth [i.e. of primal revelation] is now emerging in theologically impossible, indeed anti-theological form.<sup>23</sup>

With the rise of National Socialism, these speculative theological disputes were to assume dramatic political significance, especially as the regime began to implement concrete legislative measures against the Jews. Perhaps neither theologian could have anticipated the catastrophe that was to come, yet it was Barth who would be vindicated as Althaus’ doctrines of the orders of creation and primal revelation proved unable to cope with the surging jingoism and antisemitism of the Nazi years.

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<sup>21</sup> See Althaus, *Religiöser Sozialismus: Grundfragen der christlichen Sozialethik* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1921) and Barth, ‘Basic Problems,’ 47. This criticism of Althaus has been repeated by his critics. See especially Forstman, *Christian Faith*, 250–51.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Theologie und Geschichte: Zur Auseinandersetzung mit der dialektischen Theologie,’ *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 1:2 (1923), 742–52. The debate continued into the 1940s. See also Paul Althaus, ‘Die Inflation des Begriffs der Offenbarung in der gegenwärtigen Theologie,’ *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 18 (1941), esp. 141–42.

<sup>23</sup> Althaus, ‘Volks-Erlebnis und Offenbarung,’ 9–10. In 1934, Althaus complains that ‘The mood of theology in the last decade has not been helpful for the proclamation of the active, present God in the history of a *Volk*. God is present in history—so they told us—only in the negative: in the questionableness, voidness, and purposelessness of all historical events’ (‘Volks=Geschichte und Heils=Geschichte,’ in *Die Deutsche Stunde der Kirche*, 16). Althaus repeats this criticism in his rejoinder to the *Barmen Declaration*: ‘It seems to me that one actually combats the misuse of the concept of “general” revelation not by surrendering the whole concept, but instead by defining it more sharply and more clearly.’ See ‘Bedenken zur “Theologischen Erklärung” der Barmer Bekenntnissynode,’ *Lutherische Kirche* 16:7 (1934), 118.

## TWO | THE THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE *ERLANGEN OPINION ON THE ARYAN PARAGRAPH* AND THE *ANSBACH MEMORANDUM*

Though he never chose a side in the struggle, Althaus contributed to the discourse of the *Kirchenkampf* with two formal declarations of Lutheran doctrine. These two pronouncements—the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph* and the *Ansbach Memorandum*—were released within nine months of each other, and under similar circumstances of crisis.<sup>24</sup> In each case, recent political events had triggered the fragmentation of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK).

Althaus and Elert composed the *Erlangen Opinion* in response to a petition from the Prussian General Synod regarding the application of the Aryan Paragraph in the German churches. In light of its own deliberations, the Synod had appealed to the theology faculties in Marburg and Erlangen for ‘solemn and responsible special instruction’ about the new legislation. The legislation in question is of course the *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service* of April 7, 1933, the third paragraph of which dismissed citizens of ‘non-Aryan descent’ from civil office.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, the Synod asked whether this so-called Aryan Paragraph contradicts the historic teachings of the Lutheran church or violates its essence.<sup>26</sup> The *Marburg Opinion* would flatly reject the Prussian General Synod’s recommendations that non-

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<sup>24</sup> The ‘Theologisches Gutachten über die Zulassung von Christen jüdischer Herkunft zu den Ämtern der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche (Erlanger Gutachten),’ co-authored by Paul Althaus and Werner Elert, appears in *Theologische Blätter* 12:11 (1933): 321–24. I abbreviate the title as ‘the *Erlangen Opinion*’ or as ‘the *Opinion*.’ The ‘Ansbacher Ratschlag zu der Barmer theologischer Erklärung,’ co-authored by Paul Althaus, first appeared in *Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 67:25 (1934): 584–86. It has been reproduced in Hetzer, ‘*Deutsche Stunde*,’ 257–59. In the body of the text, I cite the version reproduced in Hetzer and I abbreviate the title as ‘the *Ansbach Memorandum*’ or as ‘the *Memorandum*.’ All translations from the German are my own; I have provided English translations of these documents as appendices.

<sup>25</sup> The text of the legislation, along with its subsequent addendums, is reproduced in Bernard Dov Weinryb, *Jewish Emancipation Under Attack* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1942), 40–42.

<sup>26</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, 321–22.

Aryan pastors be relieved from office.<sup>27</sup> The legacy of the *Erlangen Opinion*, as we shall see below, is somewhat more ambiguous.

Likewise, the *Ansbach Memorandum*, a product the ‘Ansbach Circle’ to which Althaus and Elert belonged, aimed to adjudicate the ‘divisions which have arisen within the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* since its formation in 1933’—i.e. the rupture between the *Deutsche Christen* and the *Bekennende Kirche* regarding the state’s intent to form a *Reichskirche*—as well as to provide pastoral counsel ‘to respond to those members of our church who are questioning or have fallen into error.’<sup>28</sup> As the documents originate from a similar provenance, each illuminates the other. Beyond this, however, the *Erlangen Opinion* and the *Ansbach Memorandum* share a common theological logic, and can thus be interpreted synthetically. Each seeks to formulate the Lutheran doctrine of the orders of creation in such a way as to respond to the demands of a momentous historical hour of dire threat to the life of the *Volk*. When taken together, they reveal important implications for Althaus’ rich and complex theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ as set within the wider context of his militant doctrine of the orders of creation. The *Opinion* and the *Memorandum* are now infamous; in retrospect, we can see that they yielded a theology that denigrated and marginalised the Jews and sanctioned a genocidal regime. At the very least, as one scholar has argued, the *Erlangen Opinion* represents a capitulation to ‘the hyper-German, *völkisch* zeitgeist.’<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Gutachten der theologischen Fakultät der Universität Marburg zum Kirchengesetz über die Rechtsverhältnisse der Geistlichen und Kirchenbeamten,’ *Theologische Blätter* 12:10 (1933): 290–94. I abbreviate this document as ‘*Marburg Opinion*.’

<sup>28</sup> *Ansbach Memorandum*, 257.

<sup>29</sup> See Gerlach, *And the Witnesses were Silent*, 39–41. The statement proved controversial in its own time as well. Responses to the *Memorandum* were mixed: the *Deutsche Christen* received it enthusiastically, but it drew criticism in other circles. On the reception of the *Ansbacher Memorandum*, see Töllner, *Eine Frage der Rasse?*, 106–12.



Indeed, the *Erlangen Opinion* has not aged well, especially in comparison to its Marburg counterpart, authored primarily by Rudolf Bultmann. The Marburg faculty concluded decisively that the provisions presented by the Prussian General Synod are totally incompatible with the essence of the church. In particular, the *Marburg Opinion* cites the solidarity of all confessing Christians symbolised in the efficacy of baptism: ‘That the message of Jesus Christ as the saviour of the world is directed to all peoples and all races, and that, accordingly, all who believe this message and are baptised in its name belong to the church is indisputable. The members of the church are brothers with one another.’<sup>30</sup> Further, the *Marburg Opinion* recognises only a theological, rather than a racial-biological, understanding of Jewishness:

The Jew who acknowledges the prophecy about Christ in the law and the prophets of his *Volk* and is converted and baptised is for the church no longer a Jew, and from the perspective of the church, citizenship limitations for baptised Jews are never to be accepted.<sup>31</sup>

For his part, Bultmann left little room for doubt in a follow-up commentary on the Aryan Paragraph. In his view, the legislation necessarily and unavoidably disenfranchises Jewish Christians:

In fact, it is my conviction that the Aryan Paragraph makes non-Aryan church members into church members of lesser rights and of lesser worth, as our faculty opinion has stated. All assurances that the fully-valid Christianness [*Christsein*] of non-Aryan Christians is not affected by the Aryan Paragraph and that the Christian Jew should also thus be my Christian brother appear to me as self-delusion [*Selbsttäuschung*].<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Marburg Opinion*, 291–92.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. The statement does grant that the state may find such citizenship restrictions necessary in the civil sphere, but the church cannot allow the state to enforce such restrictions in the ecclesial sphere.

<sup>32</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, ‘Der Arier-Paragraph im Raume der Kirche,’ *Theologische Blätter* 12:12 (1933), 361–62.

For Bultmann and the Marburg faculty, the protection of the full rights of Christians of Jewish descent is a matter of the essence of Christian confession and proclamation:

Whoever does not want to acknowledge the total unity between Jewish and non-Jewish Christians in the church—as it developed to its fullest expression in the New Testament in the Letter to the Ephesians and in line with the Apostles and the Reformers—and whoever does not want to put this unity into practice in the constitution of the church as a matter of principle deceives himself if he confesses that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God and that Jesus is the Son of God and the lord of all people.<sup>33</sup>

Fellow Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer likewise identified the application of the Aryan Paragraph in the church as a *status confessionis*: for him, the legislation represented a threat ‘by the very substance of which the Church is endangered.’<sup>34</sup>

When contrasted with Bultmann and Bonhoeffer, the Erlangen theologians represent an especially militant strain of the doctrine of the orders of creation within the Lutheran tradition. Still, Bultmann had hoped that the Erlangen and Marburg faculties might find common ground on the place of Jewish Christians in the DEK. In a September 18, 1933 letter to Althaus, Bultmann worried over a looming schism:

With this note I include the Marburg New Testament scholars’ plea for you to sign the theses about the New Testament and the race-question [*Rassenfrage*]; you of course teach New Testament, too. I don’t need to tell you how important it would be for me if you could lend your signature. Likewise our faculty appeals for your Yes on a *Gutachten* on the ‘Aryan-Paragraph’; I hope there will prove to be a consensus between Erlangen and Marburg here. That would be a sign that one might yet hope for the future of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*; for I must admit that I am close to doubting this future.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Marburg Opinion*, 293.

<sup>34</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ‘The Jewish-Question as Status Confessionis,’ in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works: Berlin 1932–1933*, vol. 12 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Larry Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 372. Hereafter referenced as *DBWE* 12. We shall return to Bonhoeffer’s criticisms of the Aryan Paragraph below.

<sup>35</sup> Rudolf Bultmann to Paul Althaus, 18 September 1933, NA 10.

The first document to which Bultmann refers is the ‘Neues Testament und Rassenfrage,’ an opinion issued by members of theological faculties across Germany to discredit any racialised opposition between Jews and non-Jews on the basis of the New Testament’s teachings.<sup>36</sup> But despite Bultmann’s urging, there would be no accord between Erlangen and Marburg. The *Marburg Opinion* and ‘Neues Testament und Rassenfrage’ were published in October 1933—both without Althaus’ signature. The *Erlangen Opinion*, with its acutely *völkisch* expression of Lutheran theology, followed one month later.

But at the same time the *Opinion* and the *Memorandum* are just ambiguous enough to allow for competing interpretations of their provenance and spirit. Subsequently, efforts have been made to salvage Althaus from their controversial legacy—not least by Althaus himself. In a 1947 deposition, he testifies: ‘I did not write the *Ansbacher Ratschlag*. In the first and last meeting of the “Ansbach Circle,” in which I participated at the request of D. Elert, the text was already essentially in its later, published form.’<sup>37</sup> Helmut Thielicke likewise acquits Althaus from complicity in ‘a disgraceful and pitiful pseudo-Lutheran work’ (i.e. the *Ansbach Memorandum*) by attributing it to ‘the evil spirit (and dean!) of the theology faculty at Erlangen,’ Werner Elert.<sup>38</sup> The provenance of the document is not totally clear,

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Neues Testament und Rassenfrage,’ *Theologische Blätter* 12:10 (1933): 290–94. The signatories of the document find that the sacraments invalidate any ethnic distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the church: ‘It is God who, through the audible word of proclamation and the visible sign of baptism, calls peoples of all races and peoples into one common church, wherein the believers are the visible body of the invisible head, Christ, and are therefore bound to each other in this visible community as its members’ (294).

<sup>37</sup> Deposition of Paul Althaus, 1947, NA 12.5. Töllner reports the following: ‘Looking back after 1945, Althaus stated that he signed the document only at the urging of Elert and only after several revisions’ (*Eine Frage der Rasse?*, 103). Still, even if the body of the text developed out of Elert’s draft, Althaus reviewed the document, recommended changes, and signed it.

<sup>38</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Notes from a Wayfarer: The Autobiography of Helmut Thielicke*, trans. David R. Law (New York: Pentagon House, 1995), 74–75. In a similar strategy, Lowell Green suggests that the document was authored by Hans Sommerer, who ‘seems to have couched it in language similar to [Althaus’ and Elert’s]’ (*Lutherans Against Hitler*, 239). Stayer, too, suggests that Elert, and not Althaus, is primarily behind the statement. See *Martin Luther*, 132–33. See also Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie*, 167–69. Even as the question of authorship remains open, the *Ansbach Memorandum* expresses a political theology entirely and consistently congruent with Althaus’ other writings of the same period.

and Althaus and Elert may not have been the principal authors. However, close exegesis of the *Memorandum* uncovers all the identifying characteristics of Althaus' theological personality and method; its theses clearly derive from the larger corpus of Althaus' thought, even if he did not author the entire document himself.

Regarding the *Erlangen Opinion*, although Karlmann Beyschlag concedes that the document 'demands that Jewish Christians (voluntarily) refrain from ministerial office,' he is quick to add that this recommendation is 'paralysed immediately by wide-ranging "exceptions" to be made *for* their admission. . .'<sup>39</sup> Likewise, Gotthard Jasper has suggested that what makes the *Opinion* problematic is not its theology, but its lack of clarity. Before we conclude that Althaus and Elert target the Jews for persecution, argues Jasper, we must listen for the statement's 'nuances' [*Zwischentöne*], which make theoretical space for pastors of Jewish descent in the DEK. On this account, the *Opinion* stands in opposition to the universal application of the Aryan Paragraph in the church.<sup>40</sup>

However, careful attention to the *Opinion's* nuances actually reveals that its entire trajectory conforms to Althaus' theology of inclusive quarantine as developed during the Weimar period. This means that the *Erlangen Opinion* is best read within the structure of the same dialectical theology of Jewish existence established in Althaus' early interpretive categories. The Jews remain a spiritual threat to the orders of creation and Jewish pastors are seen as a hindrance to German self-determination. At the same time, the Jews remain an utterly unique *Volk* who are to be preserved

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<sup>39</sup> Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie*, 164. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>40</sup> Jasper, *Paul Althaus*, 235–38. Jasper elsewhere argues that the *Erlangen Opinion* has been received so negatively because of its 'cautious' and therefore 'ambiguous' nature. Because of this ambiguity, alternative readings of the document are possible: some scholars interpret it as a vital episode of the pre-history of the Final Solution and others emphasise its protections for incumbent Jewish pastors. See 'Die Friedrich-Alexander-Universität,' 265–66.

because of their various performative functions. Despite their performative value, Christians of Jewish descent are nevertheless to be confined to the margins of the church and away from its centre, removed from positions of influence. The *Erlangen Opinion* thus stands as an excellent specimen of the remarkable continuity of Althaus' dialectic of pathology and performance.

Within the shared paradigm of the *Erlangen Opinion* and the *Ansbach Memorandum*, the Jews continue to exist in a dialectical relationship with Germans, and once again appear as a *necessary danger*—a threat that must be contained but not eliminated, preserved but marginalised. Below, I argue that the *Opinion's* recommendation for the Jews in the church mirrors Althaus' larger design for the role of the Jews in German society. Because many of his accusations against 'the Jew' in the Weimar writings are chimerical, it had not always been clear whether Althaus was referring to actual Jews or to rhetorical, abstracted 'Jews.' With the *Erlangen Opinion*, however, the rhetorical turns concrete: Althaus' comments now impact the employment and wellbeing of living, breathing Jewish persons.<sup>41</sup>

Before we turn to a full exposition of the *Opinion's* final recommendation regarding the place of Jews in German churches, we must first uncover the ways in which it subordinates ecclesiology to *völkisch* ideology to create a model of the church that is dialectical—that is, exhibiting both inclusive and xenophobic dimensions—in outlook.

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<sup>41</sup> There were very few Jewish pastors in the DEK in 1933. By Gerlach's calculations, with the clause's various exemptions, the Aryan Paragraph applied to less than two percent of pastors in Germany. See *And the Witnesses were Silent*, 30–31.

### THREE | ETHNICITY AND ECCLESIOLOGY WITHIN THE ORDERS OF CREATION

The *Opinion* builds on the initial findings of the Prussian General Synod, namely: that persons of non-Aryan descent, or those married to persons of non-Aryan descent, are to be prohibited from ordination. Moreover, the Synod suggested that those pastors of non-Aryan descent already serving should be forced into retirement, with the exception of those pastors who can produce evidence of extraordinary service of the church in the German spirit.<sup>42</sup> Though it does offer important qualifications, the *Erlangen Opinion* legitimates the findings of the General Synod: ‘With these stipulations, the Prussian General Synod is formally following the custom of Christian churches in all times by making admission to her offices dependent upon the fulfillment of certain personal requirements on the part of the candidate.’<sup>43</sup> In the reasoning of the *Opinion*, ‘the requirement of Aryan ancestry’ is a legitimate criterion for evaluating a ministerial candidate. In fact, say Althaus and Elert, the church has always discriminated on the basis of ‘age, gender, and physical suitability.’<sup>44</sup> In this ruling, the *Opinion* accepts uncritically the antisemitic discursive vocabulary of the Aryan Paragraph.<sup>45</sup>

From the start, the *Opinion* anticipates the theological objection that the difference between Jew and German is overcome in the unity of the church.<sup>46</sup>

Althaus and Elert grant that ‘no person, let alone an entire *Volk*, is to be excluded

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<sup>42</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, 321. The findings of the Prussian General Synod cohere with the provisions of the Aryan Paragraph itself, which makes exceptions for civil servants in office since before 1 August 1914 or who had fought for Germany in the Great War.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> The *Erlangen Opinion* employs the dubious racial language of ‘non-Aryan’ [*nichtarischer*] as defined in the *First Racial Definition* of April 11, 1933. In this addendum to the *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service*, the National Socialist government identified a non-Aryan person as one ‘who is descended from non-Aryans, especially Jewish parents or grandparents.’ The document directed all cases of disputed ancestry to the ‘expert on racial research commissioned by the Reich Minister of the Interior.’ See Dov Weinryb, *Jewish Emancipation Under Attack*, 41–42.

<sup>46</sup> An objection raised, for example, both by the *Marburg Opinion* and by Wilhelm Vischer and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the August 1933 draft of the *Bethel Confession*, §VI.6. See *DBWE* 12:416–21.

from the universal application of the Gospel.’ Indeed, Jews and Germans are equals before God under the Gospel, for ‘in communion with Christ there is no distinction between Jew and non-Jew before God.’<sup>47</sup> But, as qualified by the *Ansbach Memorandum*, the church must proclaim God’s self-revelation not only as Gospel, but also as Law: ‘The Law, “namely the unchangeable will of God,” confronts us in the shared reality of our life as it is brought to light through the revelation of God.’<sup>48</sup> Under the Law, then, ‘the status that all Christians share as children of God does not abolish [*nicht aufhebt*] biological and societal differences.’<sup>49</sup> Because the Law, as Althaus and Elert put it in the *Ansbach Memorandum*, ‘obligates us to the natural orders to which we are subject, such as family, *Volk*, and race (that is, blood relationship),’ spiritual communion and ethnic solidarity are two separate questions.<sup>50</sup> The Law of God is immutable. Though their particular historical manifestation changes depending on context, the ordinances of creation are fixed realities decided in the inscrutable counsel of God.

In this regard, Althaus’ high theology of the Law is somewhat unusual for a Lutheran theologian. Elert’s view of the Law, for instance, is more consistent with the traditional Lutheran expression: the Law exists in an opposition to the Gospel which is resolved only when the Law is abrogated in the death of Christ. In the meantime, the Law offers only despair. Althaus’ conception of the relationship

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<sup>47</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §1, 322.

<sup>48</sup> *Ansbach Memorandum*, §A:3, 258. Cf. §B:6, 258. For Althaus, God reveals himself only in the living ‘tension’ between Law and Gospel. Christian faith derives from this ‘two-fold experience of God [*Doppel=Erfahrung Gottes*].’ See Paul Althaus, *Grundriß der Dogmatik*, vol. 2 (Erlangen: Merkel, 1932), 24–28, reproduced in Paul Althaus, *Grundriß der christlichen Lehre* (Erlangen: Merkel, 1933).

<sup>49</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §1, 322. This clause shows Elert’s influence. In 1924, he had argued that an individual is ‘permanently bound’ with her blood relations, family, clan, tribe, nation, and race. For Elert, ‘the liberating work of the Reconciler [*der Versöhner*] cannot in itself abolish [*kann . . . nicht aufheben*] the blood relationship willed by the Creator.’ See *Die Lehre des Luthertums im Abriss*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (München: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1924), 82–83. The ‘compulsory status’ Elert awarded to racial identity as a *Seinesgefüge* (‘structure of being’) is characteristic of Elert’s formulation of the orders of creation doctrine, which Yoder has described as broadly ‘nomological.’ See *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, chapter 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ansbach Memorandum*, §A:3, 258. Cf. nearly identical language in the *Erlangen Opinion*, §1, 322.

between Law and Gospel, by contrast, is more dynamic. In particular, Althaus sees Law and Gospel as standing in both ‘unity and conflict’ [*Einheit und Widerstreit*]; even though the Gospel completes the Law, by virtue of *Uroffenbarung* Law and Gospel are communicating the same fundamental truth—the Divine Command—and are therefore not opposed in essence. The Law of course does this imperfectly, but it is nonetheless possible to use the Law *constructively* to inform ethical behavior.<sup>51</sup>

This fundamental continuity between Law and Gospel is reflected in the *Erlangen Opinion*’s handling of the ‘Jewish Question’: namely, not even shared fellowship in the Gospel can overcome the intrinsic foreignness of the Jewish type that has been determined by the Law of God, which remains binding. Just as he had in his Weimar writings, Althaus again envisions the *Volk* as a mysterious primordial givenness: ‘The biological bond to a particular *Volk*, which is a destiny that cannot be escaped, is to be respected by Christians both in disposition and deed.’<sup>52</sup> Thus the ordinances of creation—family, *Volk*, and race—are determined by God’s unchangeable decree. The spiritual communion of the church does not invalidate the primordial fact of one’s *Volk*, ‘but instead binds each one to the station into which he has been called.’<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> As a rule, Althaus’ view of the Law is higher than Elert’s, an insight which is significant for our interpretation of both the *Erlangen Opinion* and the *Ansbach Memorandum*. For instance, for Elert God reveals only his wrath, and not his grace, through the Law. For Elert Law and Gospel are mutually exclusive categories, but the same is not true for Althaus. Moreover, whereas for Elert Christ has abrogated and invalidated the Law, Althaus considers the death of Jesus as the ‘sanctification’ of the Law. See Wolf Krötke, *Das Problem ‘Gesetz und Evangelium’ bei W. Elert und P. Althaus*, Theologische Studien 83 (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1965), especially 28–30. Choi has likewise noted that for Althaus Law and Gospel exist in an ‘oppositional and unified’ relationship, see *Das Konzept der Ur-Offenbarung*, 106–08.

<sup>52</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §3, 322. Töllner and Hamm have both noted that Elert emphasises the racial-biological dimension of ethnic identity, and thus of the ‘Jewish Question’ as well, more strongly than Althaus. See Töllner, *Eine Frage der Rasse?*, 58, 112–13, and Hamm, ‘Werner Elert als Kriegstheologe,’ 219–20. That is correct insofar as Althaus considers *Seelentum*, not blood, as the chief trait of *Volkstum*. However, Althaus can nevertheless speak in very similar terms to Elert. See *Völker vor und nach Christus: Theologische Lehre vom Volke*, Theologia Militans 14 (Leipzig: Deichert, 1937): ‘We cannot choose our place or our type. God has decreed that. Our freedom is determined through the holy limits of this bond. We may desert our *Volk* neither in body nor in spirit, neither can we separate ourselves from its type nor from its destiny’ (7).

<sup>53</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §3, 322. The identical language appears in *Ansbach Memorandum*, §A:3 (258). Althaus and Elert’s ethnic essentialism is challenged by the signatories of ‘Neues Testament und Rassenfrage,’



That one belongs to a particular family within a particular *Volk* in one's earthly existence is a matter of providence. Germanness, therefore, is rooted in the mysterious will of the Creator.<sup>54</sup> The dissent from the *Marburg Opinion* is especially sharp on this point. Bultmann and his colleagues had put the matter bluntly: 'The Jew who . . . is converted and baptised is, for the church, no longer a Jew.'<sup>55</sup> For Althaus and Elert, by contrast, a Jewish person who confesses faith in Christ is indeed a Christian, but she is still a Jew—and not a German.

This view is consistent across Althaus' writings of the era. As he had in the Weimar period, Althaus continues to acknowledge that the church, understood as an eschatological reality, will transcend ethnic bonds. However, in its historical manifestation the church must continue to respect the radical alterity of each *Volk* and to maintain the ethnic segregation dictated by the orders of creation. In a 1937 paper delivered for the DEK delegation at the World Conference on Church, Community, and State in Oxford, Althaus comments on the application of Galatians 3:28 to contemporary church policy:

Thus the Christian recognition of the unity of all those who believe in Christ should not be understood and applied [to questions of races and peoples]. . . . As little as unity in Christ nullifies the difference between man and woman, just as little does it nullify the difference between races and peoples. Unity in

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who argue that the distinction between 'Jew and Greek' is not a matter of 'natural createdness' or the 'experience of primal-biological [*erbiologische*] factors,' but is instead used to indicate a spiritual condition before God. Further, Bultmann concedes that the *Erlangen Opinion* is correct to assert that God has called individual Christians into different vocations, but argues that Althaus and Elert have fundamentally misunderstood Paul's writings on the subject. For Bultmann, societal and ethnic distinctions maintain their validity in the 'world,' but hold no significance in the sphere of the church. See 'Der Arier-Paragraph,' 363.

<sup>54</sup> Althaus, *Völker vor und nach Christus*:

The *Volk* is a creation of God. From where do I know that? 'I believe that God created me.' [. . .] The belief that God created me includes my *Volk* along with it. For whatever I am and whatever I have God has given me out the source of my *Volk*: the inheritance of blood, of bodily appearance [*Leiblichkeit*], of soul, of spirit. God has determined my life both outwardly and down to my innermost self through the life of my *Volk*, through its blood, through its spiritual type—which shapes me above all in my language—and through history. My *Volk* is my outward and inward destiny [*Schicksal*]. This womb of my being is God's means, his ordinance, by which he creates and begets me (5).

<sup>55</sup> *Marburg Opinion*, 292. Bultmann elsewhere argues that to restrict the rights of non-Aryan Christians in the church is to show 'contempt' for baptism. See 'Der Arier-Paragraph,' 362.

Christ means community in the midst of otherness [*Anderssein*] and among counterparts, but it does not nullify all of the delimitations and differences that are necessary in our history full of sin and death.<sup>56</sup>

The *Konfliktgesetz*, Althaus' competitive philosophy of history, emerges here again.

In a world marred by sin and driven by violent competition between peoples, the church cannot resolve the inherent antagonism between ethnic groups. It can only encourage ecumenical co-existence:

The one church of Christ, to which all peoples have been called, can in this aeon never become a political reality in which the differences between races, peoples and states are nullified within itself. . . . To point to ecumenical community in word and deed—that is the actual gift of the churches to the political world. . .<sup>57</sup>

For Althaus, total ethnic harmony remains an eschatological hope beyond history.

Yet even though God will resolve ethnic antagonism in the future, Althaus does not take this to mean that ethnic segregation is a curse. Rather, as it predates humanity's dispersion and linguistic confusion at Babel, ethnic segregation is understood as God's intended design for creation.<sup>58</sup>

In the years after the *Opinion*, Althaus develops this *völkisch* ecclesiology more fully. 'The church of Jesus Christ,' he writes, 'is a trans-ethnic reality [*eine übervölkische Wirklichkeit*].'<sup>59</sup> However, this means only that the church *universal* is a trans-ethnic community, inasmuch as it exists in ecumenical relationship:

The church is in every *Volk*, but it emerges in none. . . . In its support of the ecumenical community of faith across political, racial, and ethnic boundaries . . . the church of a *Volk* testifies that ethnic boundaries [*Volksgrenzen*] and church boundaries do not coincide, that the service of its own *Volk* does not

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<sup>56</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Kirche, Volk und Staat,' in *Kirche, Volk, und Staat: Stimmen aus der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche zur Oxforder Weltkirchenkonferenz*, ed. Eugen Gerstenmaier (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1937), 22. Cf. Althaus, *Völker vor und nach Christus*, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Christentum, Krieg und Frieden,' in *Kirche, Volk und Staat*, 181–82.

<sup>58</sup> See Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 56–57.

<sup>59</sup> Althaus, 'Kirche, Volk und Staat,' 26.

exhaust its obligations.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, the ecclesiology reflected in the *Erlangen Opinion* appears so parochial that Victoria Barnett has suggested that ‘the Erlangen faculty proposed the establishment of a separate church for Jewish Christians—an idea that would be raised periodically in other parts of the church.’<sup>61</sup> In fact, the *Opinion* never makes that recommendation explicitly. It is plausible that Althaus would have endorsed the establishment of separate churches of Jewish Christians. And yet there is good reason to conclude that such a recommendation is inconsistent with his broader theological scheme, which does manifest a vision for the church as a trans-ethnic community, but only in a qualified sense.

For Althaus, the church is a trans-ethnic community to the extent that it recognises that the boundaries between the *Völker* and the boundaries between separate folk-churches are not coterminous. But it is through ecumenical relationship, and not in the everyday practice of individual churches in their concrete ethnic particularity, that the church transcends ethnic boundaries. The *Erlangen Opinion*, while it does not prescribe a separate church for Jewish Christians straightforwardly, nevertheless advances this same ecclesiastical vision in which Christians, generally speaking, congregate in self-contained churches specific to their ethnic type and relate to the churches of other ethnic types only in ecumenical association. Still, the *Opinion* cannot fully resolve the tension between exclusion and

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 27. Ecumenical involvement prevents the church from falling into idolatrous nationalism. See Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volk: Thesen für die Ökumenische Studienkonferenz in Sigtuna, 6. bis 12. Oktober 1935,’ *Wort und Tat* 11:12 (1935), 358.

<sup>61</sup> Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 129. Barnett does qualify her conclusion by alluding to the equivocal nature of the document, adding that the Althaus and Elert ‘avoided the issue.’ In reality, the regional *Landeskirchen* enforced the ‘Aryan Paragraph’ to varying degrees. In Mecklenburg and Thuringia, for instance, Christians of Jewish descent (lay people as well as pastors) were excluded from the church, whereas the *Landeskirche* in Hannover transferred its Jewish pastors into a state of interim retirement incrementally. See Lindemann, ‘Antijudaismus und Antisemitismus,’ 606–07.

inclusion because there remains a place for Jewish Christians in German churches, as will become clear below.

The *Opinion* roots its ecclesiology in a specific interpretation of the church's history. Althaus and Elert point to 'evidence that, in the early church, the Jewish-Christians [*Judenchristen*] followed a different church-order than Gentile Christians.'<sup>62</sup> Accordingly, the churches of the Reformation adopted this custom to produce a distinct form of ecclesiastical ordinance that conforms to 'the classification [*Gliederung*] of Christian people corresponding to history and ethnicity.'<sup>63</sup> In addressing the Prussian General Synod's concern that the implementation of the Aryan Paragraph might undermine the practice of the historic Reformation faith, Althaus and Elert conclude precisely the opposite. In requiring its pastors to demonstrate Aryan descent, they argue, the German church actually expresses fidelity to its own tradition of upholding ethnic demarcation:

The national churches [*Kirchentümer*] which emerged from the Wittenberg Reformation, according to these fundamental principles, have adapted themselves to the boundaries between different peoples, and have not only protected those boundaries in the vernacular language, the worship, and the makeup of each national particularity [*Eigentümlichkeiten*], but they have also contributed essentially to the cultivation and maintenance of those boundaries.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §2, 322. The *Marburg Opinion* disputes this interpretation of the early church's history: 'It indeed may also be noted here that Christians of Jewish ancestry [*judenstämmige Christen*] have been called to consecrated service in the Christian community since earliest times, just like they have been in every age and among every people, even in our *Vaterland*' (293).

<sup>63</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §2, 322.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. I have rendered *Kirchentümer* as 'national churches,' but this word also connotes the concept of churches that conform to each ethnic group's historical and spiritual particularity, such as vernacular language and social custom. The *Marburg Opinion* also admits that ethnic groups do tend to develop their own church communities based around a shared language and culture, but, in contrast to the *Erlangen Opinion*, adds that this phenomenon by no means suggests that members of different ethnic groups *cannot* or *should not* share communion in a common church body (291–92). For Althaus, the multiplicity of churches and denominations, like all historical phenomena, testifies to both the bounty and the curse of created existence. In 1927, he had argued that denominational separation is simultaneously an example of the 'creative richness of God' [*Schöpferreichtum Gottes*] and the 'historical law of segregation . . . guilt, error, one-sidedness, and distortion of the truth' See 'Das Reich Gottes und die Kirche,' *Theologische Blätter* 6:5 (1927), 140.

The Gospel is universal in scope insofar as it accommodates each particular ethnic situation, say Althaus and Elert, but it does prescribe a universal external ecclesial structure, nor does it nullify God's self-revelation as Law. The DEK is therefore authorised to restrict the admission of Jewish Christians to pastoral office without violating the nature of the church because 'being one in Christ [*Eins-Sein in Christus*] is for the Lutheran confessions not a question of external organisation, but of faith.'<sup>65</sup>

Ultimately, this means that Althaus and Elert subordinate ecclesiology to the *Volk* within the doctrine of the orders of creation. The *Opinion* presupposes that the *Volk* is a fixed ordinance of creation to which the church must accommodate itself, rather than vice versa. It is not the *Volk* that is relativised by the church, but the church that is relativised by the *Volk*. Althaus puts it most poignantly in his 1934 rebuttal to the Barmen Declaration: 'For us Lutherans, the ordinance of the church is always partially determined by the ordinance of the *Volk*, into which the church enters, as well as by political realities (to which political convictions may also belong).'<sup>66</sup> Hence the external organisation of the church conforms to the particularity of the *Volk*, which is ontologically prior to the concrete shape of the church in any given historical context. In other words, the *Volk* is the reality 'into which the church enters,' rather than the other way around.

With specific reference to the 'Jewish Question,' Althaus and Elert take this to mean that 'The ethnic plurality of external church ordinance is a necessary result of ethnic classification [*völkische Gliederung*] in general, which is to be affirmed as

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<sup>65</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §2, 322.

<sup>66</sup> Althaus, 'Bedenken,' 120.

both a matter of destiny [*schicksalhafter*] and as a matter of ethics. . .’<sup>67</sup> By this logic, a pastor must be connected organically to his congregation in order to meet the community’s spiritual needs: ‘The bearer of the spiritual office should be so closely bound to his community in its earthly existence that the ties that bind his community are also his.’<sup>68</sup> That is to say, a pastor must belong to the same *Volk* as the members of his congregation, with whom he shares blood, language, and destiny.

Anchored in this partially-xenophobic ecclesial model, the *Opinion’s* objection is thus not to Jewish pastors *per se*, but to Jewish pastors for ‘German’ congregations. Practically speaking, Althaus and Elert express profound doubt that a Jewish pastor will be able to gain credibility with a German community. Should Jewish pastors remain in their posts, the *Opinion* anticipates ‘cases in which insurmountable difficulties arise between the pastor and the community on account of the Jewish ancestry of the pastor’ due to the ‘breakdown of the relationship of trust between the pastor and the congregation.’<sup>69</sup> This conclusion signals a continuation of the notion of incompatible, primordial spiritual types that Althaus developed in the Weimar period.<sup>70</sup> There remains the subtle danger of the Jewish spirit for German life, just as before the National Socialist seizure of power.

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<sup>67</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §3, 322. An alternative Lutheran vision is offered by Bonhoeffer, who opts for the language of ‘orders of preservation’ [*Erhaltungsordnungen*] instead of ‘orders of creation’ to avoid absolutising the orders. By doing so, Bonhoeffer can then subordinate the *Volk* to the church, reversing the Althausian paradigm, as I will argue below. Bultmann raises a similar objection: ‘One may not say that this unity [between Jew and Greek] applies only to the invisible church while in the visible church the barriers which divide people must otherwise be respected and allowed. . . . Further, one may not argue that race and *Volkstum*, as ordinances of creation, are not to be ignored, but rather respected by the church’ (*Marburg Opinion*, 292–93).

<sup>68</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §3, 322–23. Cf. ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 131–34.

<sup>69</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §7, 324.

<sup>70</sup> See ‘Gott und Volk,’ 35–36 and ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 114 on the concept of *Seelentum*. On the explicit incompatibility of the German and Jewish types, see *Leitsätze*, 54.

## CONCLUSION | AMBIVALENCE AND AMBIGUITY

Althaus' personality is reflected in his mediatory posture during the *Kirchenkampf*. Neither a German Christian nor a proponent of the *Bekennende Kirche*, he straddled the ecclesial divide. In the same way, the *Ansbach Memorandum* and the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph* exhibit a similar ambivalence—an ambivalence that emerges all the more clearly when compared to the more precisely-articulated positions of Althaus' Lutheran contemporaries. But ambivalence is not the same thing as ambiguity. On the contrary, both documents reflect a dialectical yet clear theology of revelation, and, as a result, share a common framework for doing Christian ethics. The particular insight gained here—namely, that Althaus subordinates the church to the *Volk*, which is ontologically and spiritually prior—is critical for our understanding of the *Erlangen Opinion's* concrete recommendations for the place of Jewish persons in the German churches, which is the subject of chapter five.

## CHAPTER V | INCLUSIVE QUARANTINE IN MICROCOSM: JEWISH PATHOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE IN THE GERMAN CHURCHES

In the present situation, to have men of Jewish stock occupy the church's offices would mean a severe strain on and inhibition of the church's position in the life of the *Volk* and for the fulfillment of its tasks. Therefore the church must require that its Jewish Christians be restrained from taking pastoral office. Their full membership in the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*, however, is not thereby denied or otherwise restricted, just as little as it is denied or restricted for those other members of our church who fail to meet the criteria for admission to the offices of the church in some other respect.

*Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph, §5*

### INTRODUCTION

Within the *Erlangen Opinion's* *völkisch* ecclesiology, Althaus and Elert identify Jewish pastors as a strain on and a pollutant of German spiritual life. Althaus' militant doctrine of the orders of creation then authorises the state to take drastic measures to uphold order against the forces of anti-creation—in this case: emancipated and assimilated Jewry. But at the same time, Jewish Christians are to be maintained in the church—though with a degree of apprehension and suspicion. More than that, the Jews—and their scriptures—remain a critical component for German self-understanding. For Althaus, Germans interpret their own history through the narrative of Israel; therefore, the story of the Jews is a story that must continue. In light of these factors, the *Erlangen Opinion* rejects both the total inclusion and the total exclusion of Jewish persons and instead prescribes an *inclusive quarantine* of Jewish Christians within German churches.

This outcome, I suggest, represents Althaus' broader theological vision for Jewish existence in microcosm. Below, we illuminate the *Opinion's* recommendation for pastors of Jewish descent by setting into the broader context of Althaus' theology of the 'Jewish Question' during the National Socialist years. In so doing, we discover that Althaus' thought in this period is governed by the same dialectic of pathology



and performance. Jewish existence is seen as pathological insofar as it is a cursed existence that poses both a political and spiritual threat to surrounding communities. Accordingly, Jews are targeted as a political danger to the life of the German *Volk* and Jewish pastors are identified as pathogens. At the same time, Jewish existence is performative as the Jews and their scriptures function as didactic tools and hermeneutical keys for German and Christian self-understanding. A detailed exposition of this dialectical theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ uncovers nuances in the *Erlangen Opinion* that would otherwise be difficult to detect. Our analysis concludes with striking evidence that Althaus continued to interpret Jewish existence according to the dialectic of pathology and performance into the early 1940s, by which time the death camps were in operation.

#### **ONE | BETWEEN ELECTION AND CURSE: JEWISH PERSONS AND JEWISH SCRIPTURE AS KEYS TO GERMAN SELF-UNDERSTANDING**

After subordinating ecclesiology to the *Volk*, the *Opinion* addresses the crux of the Aryan Paragraph: the peculiar dialectical relationship between Jews and Germans. On the face of it, Althaus and Elert rely on the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms by leaving the civil status of Jews to the discretion of the state: ‘The first question is whether the Jews residing in Germany are members of the German *Volk* in a full sense or whether they are their own *Volkstum* living as a guest-people [*Gastvolk*]. The church as such cannot decide that.’<sup>1</sup> The *Opinion* is reticent to issue an explicit pronouncement on the Germanness of Jews—and any consequent legal ramification—partly because of the unique theological character of Jewish existence. The church cannot advise on the legal standing of the Jews because the Jews are not simply another civil constituency among others:

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<sup>1</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §4, 323.

For the church, the Jewish *Volk* is certainly not, even today, a *Volk* just like any other: it remains the salvation-historical *Volk* in its election and curse [*Erwählung und Fluch*], the *Volk* of Jesus and of the apostles (according to the flesh), and the *Volk* being preserved [*aufbewahrt*] for its final history with Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Althaus expresses this dialectic of election and curse acutely in his sermons of the National Socialist years. The ‘eternal Jew,’ with whom we first became acquainted in Althaus’ exegetical work of the Weimar era, makes another appearance in a sermon delivered in late 1936. Here, the Jews continue to bear the consequences of the crucifixion, still splattered, as it were, with the blood of Jesus: ‘The eternal Jew [*der ewige Jude*] wanders restless through history, the people of the curse [*das Volk des Fluches*].’<sup>3</sup> Althaus again invokes the Jew as a rhetorical device to illustrate the terrible immanence of God’s wrath over humanity’s historical life. ‘Who could look at the Jewish *Volk*,’ he asks, ‘and not quake before the dreadfulness of the vengeance of God?’<sup>4</sup>

But the suffering of the Jews is not purposeless; their demise functions as a caution to all other peoples, especially Germans. Specifically, the Jews are the answer to the open question of theodicy: ‘Is God silent?’ God is not. The Jews are living proof that human sin and presumption will not go unpunished.<sup>5</sup> Echoing his remarks during the Weimar period, Althaus elsewhere portrays the Jews as

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. The language of ‘preservation’ or ‘being held in safe-keeping’ is nearly identical to Althaus’ Weimar commentary on Romans 11: ‘[Romans 9–11 asks:] perhaps the unique self-assertion [*Behauptung*] of Israel as a *Volk* is not the mystery of divine preservation [*Aufbewahrung*] for a new and final history with Jesus Christ?’ (*Römer*, 101).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Schweigt Gott?’ (15 November 1936) in *Der Herr der Kirche: Predigten* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1937). Here, Althaus again connects the Jewish curse to the Jews’ oath at the crucifixion as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel: ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’ (376).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The Jews serve as exemplary objects of God’s wrath, but are no means the only people who are subject to divine judgment. The Jews testify to God’s vengeance against universal human sinfulness. See *ibid.*, 377–79. However, the Jews pose a special warning to Germans, who stand in the critical hour of decision before God: ‘In the hour when the Jewish peoples cried: ‘Crucify, crucify him!’, the entire history of the *Volk* was decided there, even until this day. The applies for each *Volk* in the hour in which it stands before Christ and consciously decides for or against him; it applies, too, for our German *Volk*’ (379–80).

antagonists to the truth of God in the drama of salvation history. The crucifixion is the climax of the Jews' long history of opposing the Kingdom of God:

The sorrow of the prophets, the tears of Jesus, the Jews' demand for his death—loud and harsh accusations against the Jewish *Volk*, plain signs of judgment. Israel has become the people of the curse [*das Volk des Fluches*] because it has struggled against the truth of God in the prophets and in Jesus. Between God and the Jewish *Volk* stand the pained cries of God's messengers and the lament of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

Their fate sealed at the crucifixion, the Jews continue to wander and toil as the people accused by God.

Yet even in the face of the wrath that looms over Jewish existence, the Jews still fulfill a vital performative function in the *Erlangen Opinion* precisely by suffering under the curse—the identical theological vocation as they fulfill in Althaus' wider system. Just as before, the Jews enact their critical symbolic function precisely as the people destined to be perpetually scattered:

In its landless dispersion [*landlosen Zerstreung*] throughout the peoples, [Jewry] reminds us of the limits of all ethnic national solidarity [*völkische Geschlossenheit*], the provisional nature of ethnic segregation [*die Sonderung der Völker*], and of the Kingdom of God, which will come through the Christ who has been promised to Israel.<sup>7</sup>

The language—and the undergirding theological logic—is taken virtually verbatim from his interpretation of the 'Jewish Question' during the Weimar period.<sup>8</sup> Through

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Kraft deiner Angst und Pein,' (3 April 1942) in *Der Trost Gottes: Predigten in schwerer Zeit* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1946), 43. In his 1936 Good Friday sermon, Althaus reflects that, in its Good Friday liturgy, the church dramatises afresh 'God's jarring grievance [*erschütternde Klage*] against his *Volk*,' that is, against Israel. Though the cross of Christ accuses 'each *Volk*, each person, indeed all of humanity' because all human existence stands under the curse of sin and death, it is the Jews who first 'made the heart of the prophets to bleed' by rejecting the suffering love of God. See Althaus, 'Die verlorene Liebe,' (10 April 1936) in *Der Herr der Kirche*, 338–39. In his dogmatic work of the era, Althaus emphasises that Israel's rejection of Jesus is representative of humanity's rebellion against God in general terms. See *Grundriß der Dogmatik*, vol. 2, 125f.

<sup>7</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §4, 323. Althaus again characterises Jewish existence as intrinsically 'landless' because the Jews are destined to roam among other peoples of the earth.

<sup>8</sup> See Althaus, *Leitsätze*, 55, Althaus, 'Gott und Volk,' 48, and Althaus, *Römer*, 101. In all three passages, as in the *Erlangen Opinion*, the Jews are commissioned to disrupt 'ethnic national community' [*völkische Geschlossenheit*] and to limit 'ethnic segregation [*völkische Sonderung*].'

this brief excerpt we glimpse Althaus' broader theological vision in which the Jews fulfill essential constructive functions not in spite of the curse, but through it.

In the National Socialist period, though, Althaus develops this logic more fully by expanding the symbolic function of Jewish persons to include the Jewish scriptures as well. In particular, he cites the Hebrew Scriptures as essential for the theological interpretation of the German identity. He had always advocated the retention of the Old Testament in Christian worship, a fact which, according to Paul Knitter, proves that 'Althaus had not fallen into the commonly accepted antisemitism of the time.'<sup>9</sup> In the same way, Fischer points to 'strong apologetic traits' in Althaus' posture toward the Hebrew Scriptures to distinguish his thought from cruder forms of antisemitism.<sup>10</sup> However, upon closer examination, the evidence suggests that Althaus actually recruits—or commandeers—the Old Testament into the service of a profoundly anti-Judaic *völkisch* supersessionism.

It is true that Althaus holds a high view of the Old Testament, which he considers the 'primal revelation of the will of God' [*Ur=Offenbarung des Willens Gottes*] that stands in judgment over all folk-laws.<sup>11</sup> More than that, the Old Testament actually forms the presupposition for Christian dogmatics. Without it, argues Althaus, it is impossible read the New Testament. On account of its function as 'indispensable preparation for the correct understanding of Christ,' the place of the

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<sup>9</sup> Knitter, 'Die Uroffenbarungslehre,' 150.

<sup>10</sup> See Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 503, 507–08.

<sup>11</sup> See Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 37–38. In an answer to Wilhelm Stapel, who characterised the Mosaic Law as a Jewish-specific folk-law with no claim on Germans, Althaus affirms a 'two-fold character' of the Mosaic Law. In its first capacity, it is indeed a folk-law that applies only to Jews. In its second capacity, however, it expresses the will of God and is therefore essential for Christian self-understanding. See Althaus, 'Nomos und Evangelium,' in *Die Deutsche Stunde der Kirche*, 50–53. Cf. Althaus, 'Nomos und Erlösung,' *Deutsches Volkstum* 15:2 (1933), 49–53. Stapel answered with 'Juden, Heiden und Christen: Eine Antwort an Herrn Prof. D. Paul Althaus und Herrn Prof. Dr. Karl Eschweiler,' *Deutsches Volkstum* 15:2 (1933), 59–65. For more on Althaus' dispute with Stapel over the place of the Old Testament, see Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus*, 287–88. Althaus enters into a similar debate with Friedrich Gogarten in *Theologie der Ordnung*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 34–39.

Old Testament as Christian scripture cannot be disputed.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, Althaus reasons dialectically about the place of the Old Testament for Christian theology.

The Hebrew Scriptures are authoritative for Christians, but only in a qualified sense.

The question of their authority is complicated, however, because in Althaus' view the text offers a progressive account of religious expression in which some forms of faith and practice (e.g. the prophets) represent a more highly developed form than others (such as ritual laws). To summarise:

In truth, the book of the Old Covenant exhibits several *layers* of knowledge of God and piety. Prophetic piety and cultic piety are two separate kinds of piety. The Old Testament is an expression also of a *struggle* [*Kampf*] of different kinds of faith with each other, and, to that extent, it is an expression of a word at struggle in itself and with itself. Yet it exhibits simultaneously not only layers, but also movement, an inward progress of faith to a new stage; thus it represents not only *layers*, but also a *history* of faith.<sup>13</sup>

The Hebrew Scriptures thus recount the Jewish peoples' narrative of moral conflict, failure, and development. In this sense, Jewish persons and Jewish scriptures share the same function: to serve as (often negative) examples in the history of faith.

Althaus does, on balance, stress the constructive function of the Law in addition to the destructive function traditionally assigned to it in Lutheran theology—that is, to make its adherents 'ripe for despair.'<sup>14</sup> Though it demonstrates examples of primitive forms of religious expression, the Old Testament under no

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<sup>12</sup> See Paul Althaus, *Grundriß der Dogmatik*, vol. 1, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Erlangen: Merkel, 1933), reproduced in Paul Althaus, *Grundriß der christlichen Lehre* (Erlangen: Merkel, 1933), 35.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Das Alte Testament in der "Naturgeschichte des Glaubens,"' in *Werke und Tage: Festschrift für Rudolf Alexander Schröder zum 60. Geburtstag am 26. Januar 1938*, ed. Ernst Hauswedell and Kurt Ihlenfeld (Berlin: Eckart Verlag, 1938), 14. Emphasis in the original. In 1927, Althaus had characterised the Old Testament as 'a book at war with itself' in 'Kirche und Volkstum' (136).

<sup>14</sup> Althaus, 'Das Alte Testament,' 13–14. Though the Law of the Old Testament does make a valid claim on Christians (in the qualified sense I have explained here), Althaus ultimately finds the concept of the *tertius usus legis*, by which the Law is used for moral instruction, unworkable without significant revision. For Althaus, the Law is a flawed expression of the Divine Command, i.e. God's directive for human behavior, which is restored by the Gospel. He would exposit this position most fully in *The Divine Command: A New Perspective on Law and Gospel*, trans. Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966). The German original, *Gebot und Gesetz: Zum Thema 'Gesetz und Evangelium,'* appeared in 1952. This point represents a notable divergence between Althaus and Elert. Elert rejected the *tertius usus legis* completely, while Althaus was willing to use the concept after qualification and clarification. See Krötke, *Das Problem 'Gesetz und Evangelium,'* 29–30.

circumstances can be interpreted as a stage in a generic ‘natural history’ of humanity’s spiritual development. Rather, it stands alone as the history of the true God’s dealings with a particular *Volk*.<sup>15</sup> As such, the Old Testament is a positive resource for Christian self-understanding:

As a monument to and evidence of [*Zeugnis*] such a history, the book of the Old Covenant remains for Christianity an always-current book. For history is not a one-time occurrence, it is not the past, *per se*. Our faith, too, transverses its stages, undergoes its inner movement. . . . In the Old Testament we find fellow-travelers and signposts for our way [*Weggenossen und Wegzeichen*].<sup>16</sup>

Althaus further expands the function of the Hebrew Scriptures to form constructive materials with which to interpret German history theologically by linking not only the German and Jewish pasts, but also the German and Jewish destinies.

The Jews—and critically, their scriptures—are necessary, then, for German church life because they are indispensable not only for Christian self-understanding, but also for German self-understanding more narrowly. Specifically, Althaus wants to interpret the political events of 1933 theologically without equating the history of the German *Volk* with salvation history [*Heilsgeschichte*] in an unsophisticated way, as for instance, the *Deutsche Christen* would later do.<sup>17</sup> Paradoxically, he does this by appealing to the story of the Jews, which ‘helps our *Volk* to understand its own history through immersion in the history of Israel.’<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Althaus, ‘Das Alte Testament,’ 14–17.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>17</sup> See Althaus, ‘Volks=Geschichte und Heils=Geschichte,’ 15–16. Althaus rejects a *Deutsche Christen* hermeneutic in which the German *Volk* simply replaces the Jews as the elect people of God. See ‘Politisches Christentum,’ 1–7 and ‘Theologisches Gutachten über die thüringer Richtung der Deutschen Christen,’ 674–75. On the *Deutsche Christen* Movement’s relationship to Jews and Judaism, see Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 21–43.

<sup>18</sup> Althaus, ‘Volks=Geschichte und Heils=Geschichte,’ 15. Later in the National Socialist period, Althaus remarks:

For this purpose immersion in the Old Testament has great significance. For in the Old Testament the basic concepts and awareness of the history of a *Volk* ‘before God’ are pronounced: the gifts and calls of God, the Law of the *Volk* that he has given, the demand of and renewal through a God-sent leader [*gottgesandte Führer*], faith and commitment to the calling as a condition for the ‘subsistence’ of a *Volk*, and so on (‘Kirche, Volk und Staat,’ 25).

Still, it is manifestly not the case that German history *is* salvation history in the same way that Israel's history is. 'Admittedly,' Althaus concedes, 'Israel and its history is a uniquely singular event [*einmalig*]. The election, mission, and promise of Israel is not merely a particular example of something in which each *Volk* will participate, but is a salvation-historical anomaly and singularity.'<sup>19</sup> Therefore a full-scale and comprehensive supersessionism is out of the question; Germans cannot simply claim the unique promises made to Israel as their own and can thus never fully replace Israel.<sup>20</sup> The crude supersessionism of the *Deutsche Christen* for this reason 'represents an intolerable religious, that is to say, messianic inflation of political events as well as an intolerable secularisation, that is to say, nationalisation of the reality of the Kingdom of God.'<sup>21</sup> Even though the Jews have failed as the people of God, there is no authority for Germans to substitute themselves into the story of salvation. Critically, Christians of Jewish descent (and not Germans) are the visible evidence of God's ongoing election of Israel:

The attempt to appoint the German *Volk* as God's people of the new covenant is a downright theological heresy. When Israel, as a whole, made up its mind against God—misconceiving its vocation and later throwing it away—it still remained the people of God, but its calling is now preserved only in a holy remnant. That remnant was the 'Israel of God.' The holy remnant no longer lives within any one *Volk*, but in the community of Jesus Christ among all peoples.<sup>22</sup>

However, while it is true that 'German history is not some kind of messianic salvation history,' it is nevertheless 'certainly full of divine works.'<sup>23</sup> Already in the

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<sup>19</sup> Althaus, 'Volks=Geschichte und Heils=Geschichte,' 16. Cf. Althaus, 'Kirche, Volk und Staat': 'The *Volk* of the Old Testament has experienced in its midst a quite unique, incomparable, and unrepeatable history as the *Volk* from whom Christ should come. Its election and promise in this sense can be applied to no other *Volk*' (25). Cf. nearly identical language in *Völker vor und nach Christus*, 13 and 'Kirche und Volk,' 355.

<sup>20</sup> Althaus, 'Volks=Geschichte und Heils=Geschichte,' 16.

<sup>21</sup> Althaus, 'Politisches Christentum,' 7. Althaus characterises the hermeneutical method of the *Deutsche Christen* as 'chiliastic fanaticism' [*chiliastisches Schwärmertum*] in 'Kirche und Staat nach lutherischer Lehre,' *Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 68:32 (1935), 752.

<sup>22</sup> Althaus, 'Politisches Christentum,' 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Weimar years Althaus had conceived of German history as ‘divine-history.’ As a result, Germany’s story, not unlike Israel’s, has the ‘capacity to function as a parable’ for the Kingdom of God.<sup>24</sup>

The Old Testament is given to Germans, reasons Althaus, as ‘evidence’ [*Zeugnis*] of God’s direct intervention into the historical life of an individual *Volk*. In this framework, the Jewish scriptures mirror the purpose of Jewish persons in Althaus’ theology. Just as Jews continue to exist as signs of judgment over all human societies, the Jewish scriptures likewise testify simultaneously to the failure of Israel as the chosen people and to the new possibility of a *Volk*’s dynamic relationship with the Lord of history. In this capacity, the history of Israel has a didactic function for all peoples.<sup>25</sup> But here Althaus uses Jewish history as a means of interpreting German history in particular: ‘God enters into a *Volk*’s history concretely, deals with it, calls it and gifts it, brings it to account, judges it, shatters ethnic presumption [*völkische Anmaßung*], forgives it, and raises it to new life.’<sup>26</sup> Here again, Israel’s chief failure—‘ethnic presumption’—is the very pitfall into which fanatical German supersessionists, tempted by ‘embarrassing religious hubris,’ are in danger of falling.<sup>27</sup>

In this way, the story of the Jews’ self-assertion before God and among other peoples—and their subsequent judgment—illustrates one of the fundamental purposes of Jewish existence: to prevent the idolisation of the *Volk*. Thus, ‘as a narrative record of God’s history with a *Volk*, the Old Testament is plainly

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<sup>24</sup> See Kurz, *Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 472–73.

<sup>25</sup> Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volk,’ 355.

<sup>26</sup> Althaus, ‘Volks=Geschichte und Heils=Geschichte,’ 16. See nearly identical language in *Völker vor und nach Christus* (1937), 13 and ‘Kirche und Volk,’ 355.

<sup>27</sup> Althaus, ‘Politisches Christentum,’ 11.



indispensable for proclamation to our *Volk* in its time of historical change.<sup>28</sup> That is to say, Israel's gross misinterpretation of its own history and vocation serves as a warning to Germans: 'The Old Testament also reminds us that, as a matter of fact, the interpretation of our own history can err.'<sup>29</sup> Because the German and Jewish destinies are linked, the Old Testament is the tool by which Germans can understand their own historical calling in a time when the danger of nationalistic hubris lurks in the shadows of national renewal.<sup>30</sup>

Though the election of Israel can never be exactly duplicated, the Old Testament serves as proof that God can enter into a special relationship with a *Volk*. In the Althausian system, Israel functions as what Yoder has called the *Ur-Erlebnis* ('archetypal experience') of God's revelation among the *Völker*.<sup>31</sup> To put it another way, Althaus considers God's covenant with Israel, singular as it is, to be paradigmatic for 'what [God] is doing, in different forms and stages, among all peoples.'<sup>32</sup> This means, then, that Althaus can transfer Israel's role in salvation history, albeit in a qualified sense, to other *Völker*, a move which is critical especially for German self-understanding. So, despite his strident criticism of simplistic supersessionism, Althaus places the Patriarchs of Israel in parallel with the 'fathers' of the German *Volk*: '[The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob] is our God. But our God is also the God of our fathers, the God of German history with all its adversity and its miracles. . .'<sup>33</sup> Germans, like Abraham, had endured uncertain years of

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<sup>28</sup> Althaus, 'Volks=Geschichte und Heils=Geschichte,' 16. See also 'Kirche und Volk,' where Althaus refers to the Old Testament as 'an example-book [*Exempelbuch*] of God's living action' (355).

<sup>29</sup> Althaus, 'Kirche und Volk,' 355.

<sup>30</sup> See Althaus, *Völker vor und nach Christus*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 79.

<sup>32</sup> Knitter, *Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions*, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Althaus, 'Volks=Geschichte und Heils=Geschichte,' 20. Kurz illustrates how, after identifying the God of the Hebrew Scriptures with the God of the German *Volk*, Althaus makes direct use of the Old Testament for German self-understanding: 'This "God of the Germans" is identical with the God of the Bible; without the latter the German *Volk* would not have been able to interpret God's action in their history. Thus the German *Volk*

‘wandering’ as they follow God’s call to their own Promised Land in the aftermath of the Great War.<sup>34</sup> Because they share an *analogous* (but not identical) divine election, Germans can learn what it means to live as a people commissioned by God by observing the success—and more critically, the failure—of Israel. It follows, then, that the church must not be deJudaized completely. German Christians need the Jews, and the ‘evidence’ of the Jews’ history narrated in the Hebrew Scriptures, as a guide to interpret their own history theologically and thereby to realise their own spiritual destiny. Hence ‘this book, when we come to it with the question of God’s purpose in German history, is incredibly near and living!’<sup>35</sup>

In this form of ethnic supersessionism, Germans, like the Jews, claim an exclusive relationship to the God of Israel. Germans join—but not *quite* supplant—the Jews as the people called by God ‘from ancient times’ whose way has been ‘difficult and wearisome.’<sup>36</sup> This statement appears even more striking in light of *Kirche und Volkstum* (1927), in which Althaus had anointed Germans as a *Volk* ‘consecrated as a special priesthood’ who ‘has had to endure the deepest questions of

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can apply many Psalms directly to itself, such as Psalm 124 for example’ (*Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 472).

<sup>34</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Geh aus deinem Vaterlande!’ (14 November 1920), in *Der Heilige: Rostocker Predigten* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1922), 14–15, 17–18.

<sup>35</sup> Althaus, ‘Volks=Geschichte und Heils=Geschichte,’ 20. In 1937, Althaus remarks that ‘[The Old Testament] is the place where any *Volk* that wants to live awake before God must go to school’ (*Völker vor und nach Christus*, 13). Elsewhere, Althaus comments that ‘In its unmediated relationship with God, in its blessing and its gifts in this earthly life and its goods, the people of the Old Testament learned to spell the abc’s of life with God’ (‘Das Alte Testament,’ 16–17). Compare Althaus’ comments during the Weimar era: ‘How we need, precisely from our own *völkisch* point of view, the Old Testament as evidence [*Zeugnis*] of God’s history with a people, how we need the prophets of the Bible! It is here that a *Volk* finds its mission.’ Althaus explicitly identifies it as the German mission ‘to testify to the coming Kingdom of God in a special form,’ which, paradoxically, closely parallels one of the prime performative functions of Jewish existence. See Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 124–25.

<sup>36</sup> Althaus narrates the history of the Germans in the same register as the history of the Israelites:

The birth of the people of Israel remains for us, as for all peoples, a memorable hour, for it is the *Volk* of the prophets and to which Jesus Christ was born. But when we, as Germans, hear: ‘I am the Lord your God,’ the God of the Old and New Testaments, it means something more for us: The God who mysteriously called you as a *Volk* from ancient times, who has gifted you richly, who has sent you the message of the Gospel and has built his church in you; who has made your way difficult and wearisome [*schwer und mühsam*]; who inspired Martin Luther in your midst and revealed himself powerfully in his faith; who calls you back out of estrangement from yourself [*Selbstentfremdung*] through prophets and heroes. . . . I am the Lord your God! (‘Volks=Geschichte und Heils=Geschichte,’ 20).

humanity more painfully and more profoundly than any other people.<sup>37</sup> Because, ironically, Jews and Germans fulfill a similar priestly office among the peoples of the world, Althaus predicts that the dreadful fate of the Jews awaits Germans as well, should they succumb to the mounting pressures of neo-paganism and secularism. As we shall see, the mysterious link between Jews and Germans would later form a vital element of Althaus' postwar preaching. For the time being, however, this premonition is critical for our understanding of Althaus' theology of the 'Jewish Question' vis-à-vis German identity: 'And should we throw away the Gospel,' he warns, 'we would never be able to rid ourselves of the sting. Our *Volk* would then be right there next to the "eternal Jew," a second figure wandering restless and without blessing [*ruhelos und segenlos*] through history.'<sup>38</sup>

## **TWO | ENEMIES OF THE STATE: THE 'GERMANNESS' OF JEWS AND THE PURPOSE OF CIVIL AUTHORITY**

As we have just seen, Althaus considers the Jews and their scriptures to be of great theological meaning. Yet neither the indirect salvation-historical import of the Jews' existence nor their dialectical spiritual relationship to Germans can determine their status as citizens of a secular state:

But the church's knowledge of the salvation-historical uniqueness and the mystery of the Jewish *Volk* does not yield the possibility of deciding the question of whether the Jews living among us belong to the German *Volk* in the fullest sense, or whether it is a foreign guest-people.<sup>39</sup>

Because that question is ultimately 'biological and historical in nature,' the church cannot resolve it, not even through the sacramental rite of baptism.<sup>40</sup> Instead, the civil dimension of the 'Jewish Question' will ultimately need to be decided by the

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<sup>37</sup> Althaus, 'Kirche und Volkstum,' 125–26.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Althaus, *Christus und die Deutsche Seele* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1934), 32.

<sup>39</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §4, 323.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. The contrast with the *Marburg Opinion* and 'Neues Testament und Rassenfrage' is strong.

state. Ostensibly, Althaus and Elert seem to assume an a-political posture with respect to the fate of Jewish persons. However, by concluding that ‘the question of the ethnic relationship between Germanness and Jewishness . . . can only be answered by our *Volk* as it relates to another *Volk* in view of its particular biological-historical situation,’<sup>41</sup> the *Opinion* awards the state theological authority to disenfranchise the Jews, as will become clear below.

Not only in the theological sphere, but also in the political sphere, emancipated Jews cannot simply be considered a people just like any other:

Today more than ever the German *Volk* perceives the Jews in its midst as an alien *Volkstum*. It has recognised the threat [*Bedrohung*] to its own life posed by emancipated Jewry and has defended itself against this danger [*Gefahr*] with legal exclusion clauses [barring Jews from civil service].<sup>42</sup>

Here again Althaus rehashes the theology of Judaism he had constructed during the Weimar period. Just as before, the Jews appear as a unique threat and an obstacle to the realisation of the German destiny.<sup>43</sup> In particular, the rise of secularism—symbolised by the Jews in Althaus’ theology—endangers German existence itself. The moment Germans cease to be Christians, through, for example, the influence of Jewish spirituality, they will cease to be Germans.<sup>44</sup> Because the felt menace of emancipated Jewry is so acute in the present historical crisis, Althaus and Elert authorise the state to take extreme action to neutralise the threat: ‘In the struggle for the renewal of our *Volk* the new state is excluding men of Jewish or half-Jewish

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §5, 323.

<sup>43</sup> Althaus spoke of the ‘threat’ [*Bedrohung*] and ‘danger’ [*Gefahr*] of the Jewish spirit in ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ (119, 130–31, and 134–35), ‘Gott und Volk’ (35), and *Leitsätze zur Ethik*, where he had expressed particular concern over the threat posed by an emancipated and invisible Jewry (54–55). Significantly, Bultmann warns that it is actually measures against Jewish persons in the church—and, critically, *not* Jewish persons themselves—that ‘threaten’ [*bedrohen*] and ‘endanger’ [*in Gefahr bringen*] the existence of the church. See *Marburg Opinion*, 291.

<sup>44</sup> See Althaus, *Christus und die Deutsche Seele*, 17.

descent from offices of leadership. The church must respect the fundamental right of the state to take such legislative measures.<sup>45</sup>

Althaus' political writings during this period illuminate the full import of the church's endorsement of the state's autonomy by connecting it to the doctrine of the orders of creation. These orders uphold creation: 'The natural orders, however, do not merely make known to us the demanding will of God. While they are grounded in their relationship to our common natural existence, they are at the same time the means by which God creates and maintains our earthly life.'<sup>46</sup> As a *Volk* (or a family or a race) fulfills its vocation, it collaborates with God in the administration of the world. In fact, argues Althaus, in the pursuit of its mission a *Volk* comes into genuine encounter with Jesus Christ.<sup>47</sup> However, in the complicated world of historical existence, the Christian must interpret God's will for the orders anew in each given context. For even though the *Wesen* behind each ordinance of creation is unchanging and unchangeable, the particular historical manifestation, i.e., the *Gestalt*, of the ordinance is dynamic. Thus the specific form that an ordinance takes is characterised by 'activity' [*Tätigkeit*]<sup>—</sup>fluid movement as opposed to a 'fixed condition [*Gegebenheit*].'<sup>48</sup> The demands of a particular historical situation therefore dictate the concrete actualisation of an ordinance of creation.

As God acts in the unfolding of history, the orders of creation continually command obedience even in their shifting constellations. This same historical determinism underpins Althaus' political ethics as expressed in the *Ansbach Memorandum*: 'As the will of God meets us always in our here and now, it binds us

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<sup>45</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §5, 323.

<sup>46</sup> *Ansbach Memorandum*, §A:4, 258.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Paul Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1934), 13. For the relationship between *Wesen* and *Gestalt* in Althaus' theology, see Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 61–62.

also to the particular historical moment of our family, our *Volk*, and our race—that is, to a particular point in time in their history.<sup>49</sup> The will of God encounters each *Volk* anew, continually laying claim to each of its members in each context, demanding a decision. In an hour of grave threat, therefore, the state may be required to violate natural law or historical precedent to ensure the *Volk*'s survival. In these instances, according to Althaus' counsel, 'I should honour the particular law of my own *Volk* [*bestimmtes Recht meines Volkes*], not natural law [*Naturrecht*].'<sup>50</sup> The state, as the guardian of the historical life of the German *Volk* and the steward of its own particular *Volk*-law, bears not only the authority but also the responsibility to restrict the rights of Jewish persons, regardless of whether the international community approves or of what natural law might dictate. By speaking of the 'threat posed by emancipated Jewry,' Althaus and Elert identify the Jews as a problem to which the Aryan Paragraph promises an appropriate—and ostensibly legal—solution.

In this framework, the state is 'the form in which a *Volk* lives its historical life,' and its purpose is to 'protect the unique life of its *Volk* in order to preserve and to unfold its own life among the peoples.'<sup>51</sup> In other words, the fundamental function of the state is to provide its *Volk* with the security and the space to fulfill its destiny: '[The state] secures for the *Volk* the freedom to unfold its own life. . . . The state thus stands in service to the highest task of the *Volk*: to fulfill its historical vocation [*seiner geschichtlicher Beruf*].'<sup>52</sup> This function is the criterion by which a state's

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<sup>49</sup> *Ansbach Memorandum*, §A:3, 258.

<sup>50</sup> Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 14. Cf. *Obrigkeit und Führertum*: 'Thus an authority has no abstract right to govern "in itself" [*an sich*], such as a natural law [*ein Naturrecht*], but instead has a determined, indeed an ethnically-determined [*völkisch-bestimmtes*] right.' For Althaus, the state must accommodate itself to the 'historical life of the *Volk*,' which is the '*Ur-Norm* of the relationship between people' (43).

<sup>51</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Zum gegenwärtigen lutherischen Staatsverständnis,' in *Die Kirche und das Staatsproblem in der Gegenwart*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1935), 6. Cf. Althaus, *Obrigkeit und Führertum*, 42–43.

<sup>52</sup> Althaus, 'Christentum, Krieg und Frieden,' 169–70.

legitimacy is measured.<sup>53</sup> Hence, at this critical hour, the National Socialist government has jurisdiction to take drastic steps to curtail a force that endangers the *Volk's* destiny:

Wherever the state does not truly belong to the people, its responsibility for the particular life of this *Volk* will come to expression in that it will limit itself to ensuring legal order and peace, as well to maintaining the economic life-conditions of the *Volk*. But where the state is truly a state of its own people, on the other hand, it can and—above all in hours of historical threat to its *Volk* and its national ethos [*in Stunden geschichtlicher Bedrohung seines Volkes und Volkstums*—must transgress these limits.<sup>54</sup>

In situations of extreme danger, such as the mounting influence of a secularised and secularising Jewry, Althaus is prepared even to submit to the absolute demands of a totalitarian state. Though he does recognise the risks, he nonetheless affirms the government's right to lay claim to every sphere of corporate and individual life—provided that the state is taking such measures to ensure the survival of the *Volk*.<sup>55</sup> With specific reference to his contemporary political situation, Althaus insists that the 'ostensible totality' of the state, even when it restricts the liberty of its constituents, is not a reflection of National Socialism's 'nature,' but rather 'exists only out of the crisis posed to our state.'<sup>56</sup> This crisis includes the chronic disconnectedness and moral bankruptcy of 'the liberal government,' for which he blames the Enlightenment and, by association, the Jews.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> 'A *Volk* that is awakened to its historical life demands a government that is bound to and committed to serving its particular life. The *Volk* has the right and the duty to measure its government by this standard' (Althaus, 'Zum gegenwärtigen lutherischen Staatsverständnis,' 6–7). Theodor Dieter has gone so far as to conclude that for Althaus '*Volkstum* is the norm of the state.' See 'Das Volk as Schöpfungsordnung bei Paul Althaus,' in *Nation im Widerspruch: Aspekte und Perspektiven aus lutherischer Sicht heute*, ed. Helmut Edelmann and Niels Hasselmann (Gütersloh: Christian Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999), 187–94.

<sup>54</sup> Althaus, 'Kirche, Volk und Staat,' 28.

<sup>55</sup> See *ibid.*, 29–30. Cf. Althaus, 'Zum gegenwärtigen lutherischen Staatsverständnis,' 7–8.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Totaler Staat?', *Luthertum* 45 (1934), 134. Cf. a similar line of argumentation in Althaus, 'Kirche und Staat,' 749.

<sup>57</sup> Althaus, 'Totaler Staat?', 133–34. Cf. Althaus, 'Kirche, Volk und Staat,' 29–30. Althaus had complained about the disintegrating spirit the Enlightenment, of which Jews are the chief bearer, in *Leitsätze* (54–55). See also Althaus, 'Toleranz und Intoleranz des Glaubens,' in *Theologische Aufsätze*, Band II (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1935), in which he criticises the modern concept of religious tolerance rooted in the 'zeitgeist of the Enlightenment [*Zeitgeist der Aufklärung*].' This form of religious tolerance has 'corroded [*zersetzt*] religious

Althaus is of course aware that a totalitarian government is susceptible to terrible distortion—‘There is a total autonomy of politics that is not from God, but from the devil’—but, even as late as 1937, he gives no indication that the National Socialist government had been disfigured by the demonic.<sup>58</sup> In the spring of 1934, the *Ansbach Memorandum* states that ‘we as Christians honour each ordinance, as well as each authority—even in their distortion—as the instrument of divine unfolding,’ but is then quick to qualify: ‘but we also distinguish as Christians between benevolent and strange rulers, between healthy and sick [*gesunde und entstellte*] ordinances.’<sup>59</sup> However, neither the *Memorandum* itself nor the Althausian political theology behind it provides any clear criteria by which such a diagnosis is to be made, save, perhaps, the preservation of order. By this standard, the National Socialist regime is a healthy ordinance indeed. Hence the Ansbach Circle’s now infamous declaration: ‘In this knowledge we thank the Lord God as believing Christians that he has gifted our *Volk*, in its time of crisis, with a *Führer* as a “pious and faithful ruler,” and, in the National Socialist system of government, God wishes to give a “good regiment,” a regiment with “discipline and honour.”’<sup>60</sup>

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seriousness’ in Germany (111). In ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ (1927) Althaus had warned of the ‘corrosive and corroding [*zersetzte und zersetzende*] big-city spirituality’ of the Jews (131).

<sup>58</sup> Althaus, ‘Christentum, Krieg, und Frieden,’ 174. That Althaus was willing to bear with the regime until 1937 is puzzling, given that he had drawn a distinction between ‘chauvinism’ and ‘patriotism’ a decade earlier. In a 1927 article he defined chauvinism as ‘a distortion of patriotism’ characterised by ‘a vain and uncalled for estimation of one’s own nation, blindness to the right to life and the worth of other nations, and a pathological excitability of the national sense of honour.’ Chauvinism manifests itself especially in ‘hateful, inflammatory war propaganda.’ See Paul Althaus, ‘Chauvinismus,’ in *RGG* 2 (1927), 1496. It is striking that Althaus did not initially recognise these chauvinistic elements in the ideology and propaganda of the Third Reich.

<sup>59</sup> *Ansbach Memorandum*, §A:4, 258. Althaus criticises the *Barmen Declaration* for its conspicuous silence on the orders of creation. See ‘Bedenken,’ 119.

<sup>60</sup> *Ansbach Memorandum*, §A:5, 258. Althaus apparently equivocated on this point in the draft. Elert wanted to render the text ‘[in National Socialism], God has given a regiment with “discipline and honour,”’ but Althaus insisted a change to ‘[in National Socialism], God wishes to give a regiment with “discipline and honour.”’ See Jörg Haustein, ‘Der “Ansbacher Ratschlag,”’ in *Nation im Widerspruch*, 223. The language of ‘regiment’ further links Althaus to the composition of the document; he preferred to speak of the doctrine of the ‘two regiments of God’ [*zwei Regimenten Gottes*] instead of the ‘doctrine of the two kingdoms’ [*die Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*] especially during the Weimar and National Socialist periods. See Gotthard Jasper, ‘Die Zwei-Reiche-Lehre bei Paul Althaus. Ein Schlüssel zu seiner politischen Ethik?,’ *Luther* 85:1 (2014), 41.



In the end, each person's duty to the *Volk*, insofar as she has been allocated to her particular *Volk* at a 'destined' [*bestimmt*] point in its history, receives its 'concrete content through the peoples' present national system of government [*die gegenwärtige völkische Staatsordnung*].'<sup>61</sup> In other words, the particular obedience that God demands from the members of the *Volk* takes shape at the specific direction of the prevailing secular authorities. This political theology helps to explain the *Erlangen Opinion*'s remarkable confidence in the National Socialist state to decide the appropriate course of action with respect to the 'Jewish Question.' This uncritical confidence—*fides implicita*, as Althaus puts it elsewhere<sup>62</sup>—stems not only from the Erlangen theologians' commitment to the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms, however, but also from their belief that the National Socialist government is taking legal and orderly measures against a force that actively hinders the unfolding of the *Volk*'s historical life.

The *Opinion* trusts that by combatting anti-German spirituality and restricting foreign influence, the state is upholding the orders of creation, the chief criterion by which the health of political power is judged.<sup>63</sup> This recommendation is rooted in Althausian political theology, according to which, so long as the state protects Germany's Christian heritage, the church may be subsumed under the state's jurisdiction. But the church-state relationship is at the same time reciprocal: where the state grants the church the freedom to fulfill its particular vocation, the church

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<sup>61</sup> *Ansbach Memorandum*, §B:6, 258–59. In *Obrigkeit und Führertum* (1936), Althaus argues that a legitimate government is defined by its ability to preserve order and prevent the 'disrespect and rupture of the orders' (39).

<sup>62</sup> Althaus, *Obrigkeit und Führertum*, 49. Althaus argues that, pursuant to *fides implicita*, a *Volk* must obey its leader even when he issues 'unpopular policies' that are difficult to understand. Cf. Althaus, *Völker vor und nach Christus*, where he argues that the nation's leadership is entitled to this 'political faith' in virtually all circumstances (12).

<sup>63</sup> See Althaus, *Obrigkeit und Führertum*, 39.

has a duty to support the state in its civic administration of the life of the *Volk*.<sup>64</sup> The church and the state likewise share a joint-responsibility to cultivate the spiritual vitality of the *Volk* by preserving its explicitly Christian character—something Althaus evidently believed the National Socialist state intended to do.<sup>65</sup>

If the church is to fulfill its function as a *Volkskirche*, then, it must collaborate with the state's drastic measures in this *particular* historical hour. Yet Althaus knows that to read the contemporary political events of the *Volk* theologically is of course precarious, because each historical moment is 'ambiguous.' Nevertheless, the church's 'proclamation must take this risk upon itself at certain critical turning points.'<sup>66</sup> Therefore, writing just months after the introduction of the Aryan Paragraph, Althaus risks identifying the *Führer's* demands on the *Volk* with the unmediated address of God: 'If the stipulations recently enacted into law through the *Führer's* claim on the people are for the purpose of a truthful and worthy life in an age of illusions and forgetfulness, then the people truly have heard more than the voice of a man.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See Althaus, 'Kirche, Volk und Staat,' 31 and Althaus, 'Zum gegenwärtigen lutherischen Staatsverständnis,' 8. Elsewhere, Althaus targets Barth's dialectical theology for its failure to recognise this reciprocal relationship between the church and state in joint service of the *Volk*. See 'Bedenken,' 120–21.

<sup>65</sup> He writes in 1935:

State and church are directed to a close relatedness and to an alliance of work for the *Volk*, provided that and as long as the state acknowledges Christianity as a historical foundation of the *Volk's* national values and wishes to maintain the life of the *Volk* through the influence of Christian thought and vigor; and provided that as long as the church can be completely a *Volkskirche* . . . embracing the entire *Volk* as an association and an ordinance in service of its final task: the effective proclamation of the Gospel to all ('Zum gegenwärtigen lutherischen Staatsverständnis,' 8–9).

Althaus' views are hardly surprising, as Hitler's early rhetoric in particular can be read as 'an aggressive political propaganda aimed at the Protestant vote.' Many churchmen continued to hold out hope that the *Führer* would keep his promise to preserve Christian institutions, both Protestant and Catholic. See Wright, 'Above Parties,' 78–88, 112–13.

<sup>66</sup> Althaus, 'Volks=Geschichte und Heils=Geschichte,' 17.

<sup>67</sup> Althaus, 'Volks-Erlebnis und Offenbarung,' 11–12. Though Althaus always interpreted the rise of National Socialism as an act of God, he never identified it directly with the Kingdom of God: 'No "Third Reich" is the advent of the Kingdom of God' (Althaus, 'Drittes Reich und Reich Gottes,' in *Die deutsche Stunde der Kirche*, 31).

In fact, the task of the church, as Althaus sees it in 1934, is to interpret this new *völkisch* passion for *Führer* and *Vaterland* through the lens of Christian theology in order to show that this ‘anonymous, nameless’ feeling is in fact none other than the call of the God of Christian scripture; to attribute it to anything else is to devolve into paganism.<sup>68</sup> Small wonder, then, that a circle of Lutheran churchmen headlined by Althaus and Elert pledged ‘to assist in the work of the *Führer* in our vocation and station.’<sup>69</sup> With specific reference to the ‘Jewish Question,’ the two Erlangen theologians assisted the work of the *Führer* by identifying Jewish existence as pathological. In the *Erlangen Opinion*, Jewish pastors are depicted as a drain on Germany’s spiritual vitality who inhibit the fulfillment of the German vocation in history.

The fulfillment of its unique mission for the *Volk*, as Althaus and Elert conclude in the *Ansbach Memorandum*, is the ‘unconditionally valid standard’ by which the ordinance of the church is measured; as such, this mission shapes both the ‘implementation and the content of the church’s proclamation.’<sup>70</sup> Within the context of this martial understanding of the church, Althaus’ image of the parasitic Jew who saps the strength of all human communities emerges again. But this time the Jew threatens not only society in general, but also jeopardises the mission of the church in particular:

In the present situation, to have men of Jewish stock [*Judenstämmigen*] occupy the church’s offices would mean a severe strain on and inhibition of

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<sup>68</sup> Althaus, ‘Volks-Erlebnis und Offenbarung,’ 12. Elsewhere, Althaus is careful to qualify, however, that the experience of national renewal comes from God as creator, but it is something other than the experience of salvation or of the Kingdom of God. See ‘Politisches Christentum,’ 15–16. Cf. also ‘Kirche und Volk,’ 353–54.

<sup>69</sup> *Ansbach Memorandum*, §A:5, 258.

<sup>70</sup> *Ansbach Memorandum*, §B:7, 259. Althaus had indicated in 1932 that the church’s purpose is dictated by the historical conditions of the *Volk*. This, as I have said, contributes toward a martial understanding of the church, which must, according to Althaus, ‘stand with its violated [*vergewaltigt*] *Volk*’ and aid it in the struggle for freedom against ‘the foreign national will [*gegen dem fremden nationalen Willen*]’ (see ‘Gegen den nationalsozialistischen Bazillus,’ 65).

[*eine schwerer Belastung und Hemmung*] the church's position in the life of the *Volk* and for the fulfillment of its tasks. Therefore the church must require that its Jewish Christians be restrained from taking pastoral office.<sup>71</sup>

The *Opinion* reasons under the assumption not only that the Jewish and German spiritual types are incompatible, but also that the Jewish type is especially dangerous. A Jewish person, even a baptised clergyman, cannot fully understand, let alone meet, the spiritual needs of a German congregation. Thus a Jewish pastor will only 'pollute'<sup>72</sup> the life of the *Volkskirche* and inhibit the realisation of its destiny.

The language of *Belastung*—which connotes both 'strain' and 'pollution'—appears especially sinister in light of Althaus' comments of 1937:

We are to esteem and to fulfill the particular life which God has given to us and with which he has entrusted us—we are to pass it on faithfully, both bodily and spiritually. We are responsible for the inheritance [of our *Volk*], for the inheritance of blood and the inheritance of spirit [*das Bluterbe und das Geisterbe*], for its *Bios* and *Nomos*, which we must maintain within our type and authenticity.<sup>73</sup>

This language, which is strongly evocative of the *Law for the Protection of the German Blood and the German Honour* enacted in September 1935, is symptomatic

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<sup>71</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §5, 323.

<sup>72</sup> I render the word *Belastung*, with which Althaus describes Jewish pastors, as 'strain,' but it also carries the meaning of 'pollution.' The image of the Jewish pastor as a pollutant is evocative of the National Socialist obsession with ethnic and spiritual purity.

<sup>73</sup> Althaus, *Völker vor und nach Christus*, 7. It is worth noting, however, that Althaus does equivocate on the importance of purity of blood during the National Socialist years. He does not accept the Nazi racial program completely. Generally, Althaus acknowledges the perceptible differences between races, but affirms the spiritual unity of humanity before God:

Today we are stressing the difference between blood. That has, along with each recognition and acknowledgment of the diversity of the divine creation, its own proper right. . . . But the Holy Scriptures—Paul before the Aeropagus in Athens (Acts 17:26)—remind us that all people originate 'from one blood'; that is Adam's blood, the blood which was disobedient to God. In this regard, there is no distinction between races (*Christus und die Deutsche Seele*, 26).

Moreover, it bears mentioning that while he was uncomfortable with what he calls 'negative' eugenic measures—forced sterilisation, abortion of fetuses with hereditary disease, and assisted suicide—Althaus does basically support 'positive' forms of racial hygiene, including something close to selective breeding. See *Eugenik im Lichte christlichen Glaubens*, especially 10–14.

of a deeply anti-Judaic element within Althaus' *völkisch* theology.<sup>74</sup> Yet the statement is by no means a *hapax legomenon*. Althaus in 1931:

This love for my *Volk* directed to God must again and again become wrath against the bastardisation and distortion of [*Entartung und Entstellung*], against the squandering of our true inheritance and the surrendering of the future which God demands of us, against the forgetting or falsification of our true task.<sup>75</sup>

Even before National Socialist propaganda targeted the Jews as pathogens, Althaus feared that foreign agents had made the German body sick.<sup>76</sup>

### THREE | INCLUSIVE QUARANTINE IN MICROCOSM

In the end, the *Erlangen Opinion* is still governed by the Althausian dialectic of pathology and performance. While Jews should be excluded from pastoral office as a rule, the *Opinion* does allow for exceptions. Critically, however, these exceptions are to be made for individual Jews, not the Jewish *Volk* as a whole: 'By this it is granted that the boundary between the Jews and the German *Volk*, in individual situations, is not rigid, but fluid.'<sup>77</sup> In his writings of the Weimar period, Althaus had entertained that a particular Jewish person may 'grow into' the German type through acculturation.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Althaus and Elert hold out the tenuous possibility for Germanisation through conversion to Christianity: 'The church itself also knows that a genuine conversion to Jesus Christ can lead a Jew directly out of foreignness [*Fremdheit*] from the German people to membership in the German

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<sup>74</sup> There is no indication of a shift in Althaus' theology of the 'Jewish Question' in the National Socialist period, even after the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws beginning in September 1935. The *Law for the Protection of the German Blood and the German Honour* targeted Jews explicitly. The contemporaneous *Reich Citizenship Law* divested Jewish persons of full political rights. It should be mentioned that this kind of language also appears in the work of Werner Elert, whose influence on the wording of the *Erlangen Opinion* is obvious on this point. For an overview of Elert's *völkisch* socio-theological system, see Hamm, 'Werner Elert als Kriegstheologe,' 218–22.

<sup>75</sup> Althaus, 'Volk,' 5.

<sup>76</sup> 'We know ourselves to be responsible before God for the whole life of [our *Volk*]*—not only for the soul of our Volkstum, but also for its "body"*—for we sense with fright the ways in which its soul is growing sick on account of its bodily weakness, i.e. the constriction of its life and its hopelessness' (ibid.).

<sup>77</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §6, 324.

<sup>78</sup> See Sparr, 'Paul Althaus,' 9.

people through his being rooted into the church.’<sup>79</sup> As we noted earlier, for Althaus the defining characteristic of Germanness is Christian *Seelentum*.<sup>80</sup> By this rubric, Jasper is partially right to conclude that ‘Althaus always recognised that national character [*Volkscharakter*] is a product of history and not determined only through race and blood. Therefore good Germans could be made even out of Jews.’<sup>81</sup>

Jasper’s conclusion is misleading, however, and is ultimately overruled by the prevailing logic of Althaus’ thought. The *Erlangen Opinion*, and the Althausian theology of the *Volk* in which it is rooted, is ultimately defined by its skepticism that Jewish pastors can connect to German congregations on an organic level. While it is true that Althaus anchors his ideal of Germanness in Christian faith, he is actually appealing to a type of spirituality found exclusively in German blood: ‘We behold the German essence most clearly in Christian-German blood.’<sup>82</sup>

The point is clearest in *Völker vor und nach Christus* (1937), where Althaus speaks of ‘the specific we-consciousness’ [*das eigentümliche Wir-Bewußtsein*] of the German *Volk*, which arises out of ‘commonality of soil [*Gemeinsamkeit des Bodens*], i.e., of living space [*Lebensraum*], commonality of blood or race [and] a common historical destiny.’ Therefore, ‘the origination of a *Volk* is a mystery of God’ and a

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<sup>79</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §6, 324.

<sup>80</sup> Althaus in a speech from 1934:

It is, for us, inwardly self-evident that we are Christian and German in an unbreakable unity; that our Germanness is called into question through Christ only insofar as all natural human types are judged as sinful through him; but our German humanness [*deutsches Menschentum*] is degraded and negated precisely as little as is manhood or womanhood. We are unquestionably certain that the German soul and faith in Christ are totally compatible, nay, even more so: that the German soul, just as with each human spirituality [*Seelentum*], only becomes what it should be by faith in Jesus Christ (*Christus und die Deutsche Seele*, 5).

In this address, Althaus outlines the unique German *Seelengeschichte* in which ‘it was the destiny of faith of the German people [*das Glaubenschicksal der Germanen*] to accept the message of Jesus Christ’ (6); consequently, ‘[w]e know no other German type than the Christian-German type’ (17).

<sup>81</sup> Jasper, *Paul Althaus*, 237.

<sup>82</sup> Althaus, *Christus und die Deutsche Seele*, 17.

‘non-deducible, plainly inexplicable primordial origination [*Urzeugung*].’<sup>83</sup> Since membership in the German *Volk* is primordial and suprahistorical, the German ‘we-consciousness’ is fundamentally inaccessible to a Jew; Germanness, so to speak, is non-transferable.<sup>84</sup> But here the Althausian theology of *Volkstum* is riddled with the kind of inconsistencies endemic to all racist patterns of thought. If Germanness is ‘primordial’—that is, if it is immutable—why is Althaus so worried that Jews will alter it? Or, to come at the problem another way, if spiritual qualities are *intrinsic* to particular *Völker*, the pollution of one *Volk* by the qualities of another should not even be possible.<sup>85</sup>

The dominant logic of the *Opinion*, especially when interpreted in the wider matrix of Althaus’ theology of the ‘Jewish Question,’ suggests that pastors of Jewish descent could never truly be German in the deepest, spiritual sense—even if they do convert to Christianity. By extension, the document implies that Jews must remain outsiders even within their own community of worship. Nevertheless, the *Erlangen Opinion* does make final recommendations that controvert the more aggressive policy proposed by the Prussian General Synod. Despite the xenophobic dimension of the document’s ecclesiology—and its suspicion of the pathological spirituality of Jews—its authors maintain that to dismiss currently serving pastors from office

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<sup>83</sup> Althaus, *Völker vor und nach Christus*, 5–6. The resonance with National Socialist propaganda—commonality of blood and soil, *Lebensraum*—is clear. In 1931, Althaus had intimated that German spirituality originates in the ‘womb’ [*Mutterschoß*] and comes to birth only through physical ‘procreation’ from two German parents. See ‘Volk,’ 4–5. See also ‘Kirche und Volk,’ 352.

<sup>84</sup> Gotthard Jasper, a political scientist by training, has theorised that the kind of German nationalism Althaus and Elert are representing here is plagued by its ‘lack of content [*Inhaltslosigkeit*].’ American and French nationalisms, argues Jasper, are rooted in ideals that are universal in scope: American nationalism legitimates itself by ‘making the world safe by democracy’ and French nationalism seeks to spread the principles of ‘freedom, equality and fraternity.’ German nationalism, by contrast, ‘defines itself—even now—ethnically, biologically, and in terms of blood.’ Since it is defined by ethnicity, Germanness has no universal content and thus cannot be shared in the same way that national identities defined by ideals (Americanness, Frenchness) can. See ‘Die Friedrich-Alexander-Universität,’ 263.

<sup>85</sup> Internal contradictions like these have led Susannah Heschel to conclude that it is really the *instability* of race, and not its *immutability*, that lies at the heart of racist worldviews. See ‘The Slippery Yet Tenacious Nature of Racism,’ 6–7.

solely on the basis of ancestry would violate the essence of the pastoral office.<sup>86</sup>

Instead, ‘Statement of extraordinary grounds should be required on a case-by-case basis not for their retention in office—as in Clause 3 of the Prussian church bylaw—but for their dismissal.’<sup>87</sup> For this reason, Althaus and Elert conclude that ‘here the church cannot simply adopt the regulations of the state’s legislation in every respect, but rather it must act according to the rules which arise out of its nature as the church.’<sup>88</sup>

However, even in the event that a Jew does convert to Christianity, his appointment to pastoral office in the DEK remains mostly a theoretical possibility—and a remote one at that.<sup>89</sup> Still, the *Opinion* is more ambivalent about the place of the Jews than its critics have often imagined. It is indeed true that the *Erlangen Opinion* rejects a universal application of the Aryan Paragraph in the German churches. It is also true that the *Opinion* recommends that, though Christians of Jewish ancestry are to be disqualified from leadership as a general rule, their membership in the DEK should not be denied or otherwise restricted.<sup>90</sup>

But it is precisely in this recommendation that we discern that, at the deeper levels of its structural logic, the *Opinion*’s prescription for Jews in German church life parallels closely Althaus’ broader vision for the place of the Jews in German society. In spite of the church’s eschatological character as a community defined by a

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<sup>86</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §7, 324.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Erlangen Opinion* §6, 324:

It follows from all of this that the church, in its ordinance, explicitly leaves room for exceptions in which Christians of Jewish or half-Jewish descent may be admitted to its offices. The administration of the ecclesiastical office by a person of Jewish stock has always been rare in our church and it should continue to maintain the character of an exception also in the future, but as such it must remain a possibility according to special direction.

Althaus and Elert ultimately leave the adjudication of individual cases to the church’s bishops.

<sup>90</sup> *Erlangen Opinion*, §5, 323.



Gospel that transcends every ethnic division, the Jews are nevertheless quarantined off from their fellow Christians, even, paradoxically, within the church's walls. Yet as the concrete evidence of the continuing election of the Jews, Christians of Jewish descent perform a crucial salvation-historical role and therefore must exist in the church, but not in positions of influence.<sup>91</sup> In the same way, the Jews—and crucially, Jewish scriptures—fulfill a critical symbolic function in German society as living cautionary tales who warn of the dangers of ethnic presumption—but always from the margins and never from the centre.

The *Erlangen Opinion* is most intelligible, then, when read within the interpretive matrix of inclusive quarantine. Althaus fits this paradoxical societal vision—the foreigner as a-part-of-but-apart-from the national community—to an ecclesial scale. Despite the xenophobic elements of the Althausian ecclesiology reflected in the *Erlangen Opinion* (i.e., the pathological pole of the dialectic), it also manifests a theological logic with a genuinely trans-ethnic outlook by defending the membership of Christians of Jewish descent in the DEK. Simply put, Althaus does not contemplate a church, not least a 'German' church, without Jews. I have argued here that Jewish persons and Jewish scripture therefore must remain in the church as they fulfill a parallel function: to stand as living signs that mitigate against the false worship of the idol of ethnic jingoism.

Because their history is a cryptic key to German self-understanding, moreover, the Jews remain indispensable in Althaus' theological system, dangerous though they are. In both contexts—within the church and in secular society—the Jews exist in dialectical relationship to Germans as a problem that must be contained

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<sup>91</sup> Althaus had argued earlier that the continuing election of Israel is maintained in Christians of Jewish descent. See *Römer*, 93.

but not expelled, a threat that must be neutralised but not eliminated. In each case, the Jews are held in an inclusive quarantine—pushed to the edge of the community to serve as voiceless exhibits to be seen but not heard. On this point, Bultmann truly had discerned the spirit of the *Erlangen Opinion*, and his criticism cuts to the quick: ‘Were I a non-Aryan or not-purely-Aryan Christian, I would be ashamed to belong to a church in which I am indeed allowed to listen, but must remain silent.’<sup>92</sup>

#### FOUR | PATHOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE BEYOND THE *ERLANGEN OPINION*

The entire trajectory of the *Opinion*—that the Jews, conceived as a force that destabilises the orders of creation and pollutes German spirituality, are to be confined along with their scriptures as pieces of evidence on the margins of the church community—conforms exactly to the theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ that Althaus had developed during the Weimar period. This dialectical approach represents a challenge for the binary model established by the literature. On the one hand, Beyschlag, commenting within the narratives of sympathy, suggests:

If one looks at it more closely, the *Erlangen Opinion* reveals itself as an extremely skillful and tactical attempt to safeguard not only the regulation of the Aryan-question [*Arierfrage*], but along with it ecclesial autonomy with respect to the state (a traditional Erlangen desideratum) in the face of a supremely dangerous precedent.<sup>93</sup>

Contrast the judgment of Berndt Hamm, which is representative of the narratives of suspicion:

The *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph* was no isolated and incomprehensible lapse on the part of the Erlangen theologians, but instead corresponded completely with their already previously known and . . . theologically rooted affinity for a ‘cultivated’ [*gepflegten*] nationalism, *Volk*-ideology, and antisemitism; and it corresponded with a widespread concern with the fiction of a closed ethno-biological organism in the territorial

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<sup>92</sup> Bultmann, ‘Der Arier-Paragraph,’ 362.

<sup>93</sup> Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie*, 164.

churches.<sup>94</sup>

This interpretive divide is due in part to the inherent difficulty in classifying Althaus' theology of the 'Jewish Question.' As I have argued here, the model that Althaus himself projects is not binary, but dialectical; Jews are neither included nor excluded, but suspended in between.

At any rate, some scholars have concluded that 'possible special-treatment [*Sonderbehandlung*] or special-legislation [*Sondergesetzgebung*] for the Jewish minority, which would later become a gruesome reality under the "Third Reich," is for [Althaus] unthinkable.'<sup>95</sup> Yet this claim appears to overstate the case. Special legislation was thinkable for Althaus—he thought it. He then recommended its application in the church, albeit in a qualified way. By early 1933, he had already established a view of the Jewish problem in Germany that stood in close proximity to the 'tendencies and goals of National Socialist *Judenpolitik*.' From there, argues Marikje Smid, it was only a short step to the approval of discriminatory legislation regarding the place of Jews in the church.<sup>96</sup>

Perhaps for Althaus the annihilation of the Jews was beyond the realm of imagination, but a candid sermon sketch from 1942 indicates that his theology of Judaism nevertheless took a very violent shape even after the first concentration camps began operation.<sup>97</sup> These notes serve as a neat summary of Althaus' theology of the Jews, as the full range of the dialectic of pathology and performance is on display. The Jews appear both as a contagion and as an indispensable didactic sign.

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<sup>94</sup> Hamm, 'Schuld und Verstrickung,' 31.

<sup>95</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 510. Gotthard Jasper has likewise concluded that for Althaus the extermination of the Jews would have been an 'unthinkable' solution to the 'Jewish Question.' See *Paul Althaus*, 495.

<sup>96</sup> Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus*, 288–89.

<sup>97</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Ein Volk, das "nicht gewollt" hat!' [June 1942], NA 12.5.

Through this brief sermon outline, Althaus sums up the total narrative of his theology of the ‘Jewish Question’: the Jews, having squandered their original salvation-historical vocation, now wander the earth bearing the ‘mark of God’ in order to testify to divine truths. In so doing, the Jews, even if they do not recognise it, perform a critical didactic function as their miserable and dangerous existence functions yet again as a key for German self-understanding. Most significantly, the German and Jewish destinies are linked, even though Althaus pits the Jews as an enemy of Germans: ‘We Germans are aware that we are to lead this war against world-Jewry [*das Weltjudentum*].’<sup>98</sup>

To emphasise the performative capacity of Jewish existence, Althaus begins with a *locus classicus* of the ‘witness-people’ mythology: ‘Frederick the Great once challenged a pastor in conversation: “Can you name for me any proof for the existence of God?” The pastor answered: “Your majesty, the Jews!”’<sup>99</sup> With this anecdote, Althaus highlights the unique theological quality of Jewish existence—a consistent theme throughout his writings. Now, he says, the ‘Jewish Question’ has arisen prominently once again. Whoever penetrates it deeper will soon realise: the Jews are not a political *Volk* like any other.<sup>100</sup> The peculiar nature of Jewish existence means that the ‘Jewish Question’ cannot be addressed solely on racial-biological terms. Jews are not merely a socio-political ethnic body, but strange signs of divine truths shrouded in ‘a sinister mystery [*ein unheimliches Geheimnis*].’ As such, Jewish persons are indispensable evidence for God’s existence:

This unfortunate *Volk* bears the mark of God, the mark of his curse. In its decisive hour, it offered God only its defiance. Therefore God has cast it

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in the original. The anecdote of the conversation between Frederick the Great and a pastor is an antisemitic ‘legend’ used by Christian theologians for centuries. See Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 58–59.

<sup>100</sup> Althaus, ‘Ein *Volk*,’ 1. Emphasis in the original.

away and marked it; therefore to this day it is a *Volk* without blessing. Proof [*Zeugnis*] that the God of the Bible is the Living One; that his Word, spoken through the prophets, has come true in Jesus; that God lives and that God is not mocked. The fate [*Schicksal*] of Jewry—evidence of God, evidence for the truth of the Bible!<sup>101</sup>

Like Jewish persons themselves, the Old Testament also functions as ‘proof’ [*Zeugnis*] of the righteousness of God’s judgment. Indeed, the Jews’ own scriptures testify to the ways in which they have distorted their divine vocation: ‘God had originally elected this *Volk* to a special giftedness and mission. . . . In the days of yore, God did much for this *Volk*—the Old Testament in its grandeur is proof of that!’<sup>102</sup> At this point, Althaus narrates the history of the Jews as to emphasise their depravity. At every turn, the Jews have fundamentally misunderstood their purpose as a *Volk*. The majority of the Jews

again and again misuse the call of God and their gifting in the most horrible way. God spoke of his dominion, which will bring salvation to all peoples. But Israel misjudged it and got it all backwards. . . . Israel feels itself to be the ‘chosen people,’ though not in the way that God intended, but instead with human arrogance.<sup>103</sup>

Not only that, the Jews also ‘imprisoned’ the spirit of the Law behind a system of ‘human statutes.’<sup>104</sup> Small wonder, Althaus reasons, that they also killed Jesus. Jerusalem has always been a ‘murderer of the prophets.’<sup>105</sup>

With the rejection of Jesus, Jewish history reaches its dreadful climax. Althaus now connects the failure of *Israel* with the contemporary scourge of the *Jews*. The rhetorical move toward the pathological dimension of the dialectic merits full citation:

God had been patient, again and again. But now the measure is full. God sums up all that had happened over the centuries and now the bill is due. The

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 1–2. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 2.

year 70 is the response to Golgotha and to all blood that cries out to heaven: the destruction of Jerusalem, the burning of the temple, the curse over Israel, its outward dispersion [*Zerstreuung*] in the world, its inward torpor and degeneracy [*seine innere Erstarrung und Entartung*] (it has rejected the spirit of the prophets, rejected its better self). Now Islam has come to roost in Jerusalem, and the people of Israel wander throughout the earth as the ‘eternal Jew,’ strange and sinister [*fremd und unheimlich*] to all other peoples, or, when they forget that, a contagion [*Ansteckung* (sic)] and a mortal danger [*Lebensgefahr*]. This is how God judges! Exceedingly gifted—and dreadfully afflicted! Who can look at the Jewish *Volk* without learning to fear God!<sup>106</sup>

The language of pathology that Althaus had used throughout the Weimar years and into the National Socialist era reaches explicit expression here. The Jewish curse manifests like a disease with inward and outward symptoms: dispersion, torpor, and degeneracy. The ‘eternal Jew’ is a ‘contagion’ [*Ansteckung*] who carries the plague, threatening to infect the peoples around them. If the disease is not quarantined, ‘mortal danger’ [*Lebensgefahr*] is sure to follow. Critically, it is when the Jews forget that they are supposed to remain a stranger to other peoples—that is to say, when Jews assimilate into their host societies and become ‘world Jewry’—that they turn lethal.

However, sick though he is, the ‘eternal Jew’ does not wander aimlessly. Ironically, the Jews still fulfill their vocation—to testify to the existence of the God of the Bible—but not in the way they had anticipated. Rather, the affliction of the Jews serves a vital performative function, especially for Germans. Althaus now swings back to the positive pole of the dialectic by stressing the indispensability of Jews and their history. Paradoxically, Jewish existence is necessary because

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid. In the second edition of *Theologie der Ordnungen* in 1935, Althaus had identified *sickness* as a consequence of contempt of the orders of creation, which dictate that the peoples are to remain segregated: ‘[The orders of creation] remain our destiny, even if we despise them and fail to fulfill their purpose. They punish us. They retaliate against us as life—whose essential constitution comes from them—falls ill [*erkrankt*] and degenerates on them’ (18).

Germans and Jews share an analogous spiritual election and mission. In this capacity, Jewish existence is didactic:

All of this is a warning for us. We cannot point arrogantly to this *Volk*: look there, the rejected ones! How entirely different we are from them! If we speak like that, then we ourselves have become Jews—Pharisees whom God will judge just like he judges Israel. No, this history of God with Israel comes very near to us. For Jesus Christ has also come to us Germans. His word has sounded out among us. He has also sent us prophets.<sup>107</sup>

The German spiritual history parallels that of Israel—a theme Althaus had developed earlier in the National Socialist years.<sup>108</sup> In particular, those Germans who exhibit ‘appalling apathy’ toward their Christian heritage are acting just like the Jews who rejected their own prophets.<sup>109</sup> Germans of all people must learn from Jews *or else become Jews*—and suffer the same fate. Althaus therefore uses the Jews to spark religious re-awakening amongst Germans. He is able to do this because, in a strange way, the German *Volk* is the spiritual counterpart of the Jews. The fate of each will be determined by its encounter with the Messiah: ‘For us Germans, as for Israel, our destiny is Christ.’<sup>110</sup>

## CONCLUSION | DESTINY AND TRAGEDY

In Althaus’ complex theology of the ‘Jewish Question’—climaxing to its clearest expression in this sermon from June 1942—the German story is actually a re-articulation of the Jewish story, with one critical difference: Germans still have the hope of fulfilling their vocation without falling under the curse that haunts Israel. Nevertheless, the relationship between Jew and German remains dialectical in character, oscillating simultaneously between inclusion and exclusion, pathology and performance.

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<sup>107</sup> Althaus, ‘Ein *Volk*,’ 3.

<sup>108</sup> See especially Althaus, ‘Volks=Geschichte und Heilsgeschichte.’

<sup>109</sup> Althaus, ‘Ein *Volk*,’ 3. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Even in the face of mounting persecution of the Jews at the hands of the National Socialist regime, Althaus' vision remains strikingly consistent: it is still the Jewish destiny to cleave to a segregated existence on the periphery of the church, just as the Jews are destined to fulfill their precarious mission as perpetual wanderers on the fringes of every human society. Not even a common spiritual bond in the Gospel could nullify the uncompromising Law of historical existence:

We cannot abolish segregation and struggle without destroying God's creation. It makes no sense even for Christian conferences to make resolutions against the hate between peoples and races or to recommend a 'Christian' politics that has been purified by its resolutions. . . . There is no total commitment for my *Volk* without ardent passion and wild wrath.<sup>111</sup>

In the end, even baptised Jews remain a danger for Germans. Althaus had insisted in 1937 that 'we do not want to master other peoples or intrude into their own self-understanding' through *völkisch* theology,<sup>112</sup> but there was an exception to be made—as always—for the Jews. The Jews bear a tragic destiny: pushed to the margins and deprived of their rights because 'no *Volk* can rise to new vitality without displacing and raping [*verdrängen und vergewaltigen*] another.'<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 54. Althaus here recalls his concept of the *Konfliktgesetz*, according to which 'the love of *Volkstum* and *Vaterland* . . . is bound up inextricably in antipathy, wrath, and hate.'

<sup>112</sup> Althaus, *Völker vor und nach Christus*, 4.

<sup>113</sup> Althaus, 'Drittes Reich und Reich Gottes,' 31. The language of violent subjugation is evocative of the concept of the 'law of displacement' [*Verdrängungsgesetz*], which Althaus had developed in 'Kampf,' *RGG* 3 (1929), 595–96. Cf. Althaus, *Völker vor und nach Christus*, 9. As he had during the Weimar period, Althaus again emphasises that the 'law of strike and counter-strike, blow and counter-blow' is a curse and an expression of God's wrath. Through the death of Christ, God has inaugurated a world in which these laws of conflict can be overcome by the Gospel in the lives of individual Christians, even though the laws still govern humanity's historical existence in general. See Althaus, 'Zusammenstoß' (21 July 1935), in *Der Herr der Kirche*, 250–53.





MOVEMENT III: THE DEATH THROES OF JUDAISM: REFLECTION ON THE 'JEWISH QUESTION' IN THE POSTWAR YEARS (1945–1966)

**SECTION III INTRODUCTION | TAKING BACK AND MAKING GOOD AGAIN**

With the Third Reich defeated and many German cities lying in ruins, Althaus pleaded for clemency first and foremost for the German people. Still, though his writings of the postwar years often betray a lack of theological self-awareness, Althaus does—to varying extents, depending on the piece—acknowledge Christian guilt, though he usually does not specify for what. Although he rarely names the Jews as its victims, he charges Christian theology to begin the work of moral repentance after the war:

The Christian community has the great task of rousing its members to a desire for peace: for those who have perpetrated injustice against the other, to rouse the desire to recant [*zurücknehmen*] and to make amends [*wiedergutmachen*]; for those who have suffered injustice, the will to forgive and to restore brotherly community anew.<sup>1</sup>

With this two-fold formula—taking back [*zurücknehmen*] and making good again [*wiedergutmachen*—Althaus himself provides the rubric by which we can follow the trajectory of his postwar theology of the 'Jewish Question.' First, does Althaus recant? Second, does he attempt to make good again? In other words, does his thought hold any promise for a constructive Christian theology in a post-*Shoah* world?

Before we can even address the question of theological repair (Movement IV)—that is, of making good again—we must determine whether Althaus relinquishes his dialectic of pathology and performance in light of the crimes against the Jews. The answer, like Althaus' theology of the 'Jewish Question' itself, is

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Amnestie? Von der Recht-schaffenden Macht der Vergebung,' *Zeitwende* 20:12 (1949): 878.

dialectical: yes and no. A clear solution is obscured by the complex nature of his reasoning about the Jews; at various points the dialectic remains clearly-articulated and pronounced and at others it collapses. Specifically, Althaus maintains and in some cases intensifies the dialectic in his postwar preaching, where Jews and their history continue to have a pastoral value for Germans that climaxes in the direct identification of the German and Jewish destinies. The matter is complicated, moreover, by Althaus' ambivalent personal attitudes toward actual Jews as manifest in his concrete actions with respect to Jewish persons and those who assist them. In the academic sector, however, Althaus reconsiders the pathological dimension of Jewish existence in his works of theological ethics and exegesis—as a result, the performative function of Jewish persons more or less disappears from the sphere of dogmatics. In Althaus' postwar theology, Jews truly *live* only the pages of scripture; the ongoing significance of Jewish persons is altogether more uncertain.

In sum, Althaus rejects some dimensions of the theological system he had constructed during the Weimar and National Socialist years (e.g., the deicide libel, the Jews as an 'open wound'), but retains others (such the use of Jews as a hermeneutical key to interpret German experience). By tracing these views across his postwar pastoral materials and personal testimony and correspondence (chapter six), and works of dogmatics and exegesis (chapter seven), we discern the enduring tension of *continuity and discontinuity* in Althaus' postwar theology of the 'Jewish Question.' There is development and reform but not rupture, even though ultimately his theological categories for understanding Germanness and Jewishness collapse, as we shall see. His paradigms simply could not make sense of what had happened: his ideal of Germanness had failed and now, in a qualified sense, Germans had become like Jews. In the end, Althaus did not have the strength to reinvent himself.



## CHAPTER VI | CATASTROPHE AND CONSCIENCE: JEWS AND GERMANS AS FELLOW TRAVELERS

Are we Germans a people of misfortune among the other peoples—like the Jews, their counterpart? A people under God's curse? Has the Creator, in his wrath, made us only for disaster? Does he have only dark plans for us?

Paul Althaus, 'Gottes Gedanken mit uns' (1945)

### INTRODUCTION

In the immediate aftermath of National Socialism's collapse, Althaus turns almost straight away to the narrative of Israel as a means of making sense of Germany's national cataclysm. The Jews—and more specifically their history as narrated in the Hebrew Scriptures—once again appear as a hermeneutical key for decoding German experience. Hence the performative dimension of Jewish existence is intensified in the pastoral sphere even as Althaus gradually downplays the pathological dimension. In the end, the dialectic of pathology and performance is maintained in Althaus' postwar preaching, albeit in a muted way.

There is a similar ambivalence in Althaus' personal attitudes toward Jews. As his personal correspondence and archival documentary evidence suggests, Althaus was capable of suspending his personal distaste for, and theological mistrust of, Jews to maintain personal relationships with Jewish students and, on at least one occasion, even to intervene on behalf of those arrested for aiding Christians of Jewish descent. The combined weight of his pastoral reflection on Jews and Judaism in the abstract and his concrete dealings with Jewish persons testify to the abiding tension of his dialectical theology of the 'Jewish Question'—which, it seems to me, was something he could resolve neither pastorally nor in his own life. In a paradoxical way, the Jews of the Old Testament and contemporary Jewish Christians appear as fellow travelers in the German journey of faith.

## ONE | DOWNFALL AND AFTERMATH: DENAZIFICATION AND REINSTATEMENT

Althaus' visions of a re-dignified and re-christianised Germany had been swallowed in the Nazi nightmare. But his personal nightmare was not quite over. Soon enough, the Allies began to detain and try Nazi criminals of war. But the *Spruchkammer* came calling for *Schreibtischtäter*, too, and Althaus, like other bureaucrats across the Reich, was not above suspicion.<sup>2</sup> Despite clearing the initial round of denazification—and having chaired a denazification committee himself—Althaus was dismissed from his position at Erlangen by the Allied commission in early 1947, ostensibly on the grounds of his politics. His case appears to have suffered from an uncharitable representation in a memorandum prepared for the U.S. occupation force by his colleague Hermann Sasse. According to Lowell Green, Sasse depicted Althaus as a 'forerunner of the German-Christians.'<sup>3</sup> Althaus himself made a pointed reference to the unflattering remarks of Sasse's memorandum in a deposition from 1947.<sup>4</sup> In any event, the notice appeared thus in the local newspaper:

Professor Dr. Paul Althaus, theologian. In his book 'Die deutsche Stunde der für die Kirche' [*sic*] he welcomed the events of the year 1933. His book 'Obrigkeit und Führertum' attempted to justify treason against the Weimar Republic and to make democracy laughable. As the chairman of the denazification at the University of Erlangen he recommended the reinstatement of anti-democratic professors.<sup>5</sup>

During his denazification trial, Althaus acknowledged the perception of his work circulating at the time. Doubtless aware of the language of this particular newspaper

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<sup>2</sup> The *Spruchkammerverfahren*, or 'Spruchkammer trials,' as described by Katharina von Kellenbach, were 'proceedings designed to ascertain varying level [*sic*] of complicity and impose sanctions appropriate to the degree of culpability on the basis of character witnesses, often drawn from camp survivors, clergy, or neighbors.' See *The Mark of Cain: Guilt and Denial in the Post-War Lives of Nazi Perpetrators* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 36–39. As von Kellenbach notes, these trials were not reserved only for SS guards and high-ranking party functionaries, but also for ordinary citizens, including university professors.

<sup>3</sup> See Green, *Lutherans Under Hitler*, 346–48.

<sup>4</sup> Deposition of Paul Althaus, 1947, NA 12.5, 2. Althaus intimates that Sasse characterised Althaus' political theology self-servingly in order to vindicate himself.

<sup>5</sup> '76 Entlassungen an der Erlanger Universität,' *Die neue Zeitung*, 3 February 1947.

article, he brushed aside any attempt to connect his early *völkisch* writings to National Socialism as ‘laughable.’<sup>6</sup>

Althaus began his personal amnesty campaign after the initial verdict came down. As he appealed to colleagues and former students to testify about his resistance to National Socialism in the interim between his dismissal and reinstatement, some, such as the Oxford missiologist Nathaniel Micklem, demurred.<sup>7</sup> Others, however, were quick to defend him. Tübingen theologian Helmut Thielicke, once Althaus’ own doctoral student, admitted that ‘[i]t is doubtless correct that Professor Althaus was relatively optimistic about National Socialism in 1933.’ However, Thielicke argued that in time Althaus came to recognise the evil of Nazism. According to Thielicke, in fact, the most decisive thing is not that Althaus came to reject National Socialism, but that National Socialism rejected *him*: ‘I consider these experiences very significant in the question of political judgment, because National Socialism itself cultivated the clearest instinct for its opponents.’<sup>8</sup> Likewise Hans Schmidt, formerly the chaplain of university students in Erlangen, recalled private conversations in which Althaus ‘castigated the methods of National Socialism.’ Schmidt also reported that the regional National Socialist leadership had targeted Althaus for arrest, but they dared not lay a hand on him because they feared “the voice of the people.” In light of these factors, ‘[i]t would be totally incomprehensible if today, after the collapse of the National Socialist dictatorship,

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<sup>6</sup> Deposition of Paul Althaus, 1947, 2.

<sup>7</sup> See Nathaniel Micklem to Paul Althaus, 16 May 1947, NA 12.5.

<sup>8</sup> Helmut Thielicke, ‘Äusserung über Herrn Professor D. Paul Althaus, Erlangen,’ 28 March 1947, NA 12.5, 4. As evidence of the party’s suspicion of Althaus, Thielicke notes that Althaus’ writings against the sterilisation law were banned and that when Thielicke’s own employment was imperiled because of his political commitments, the party told him that Althaus’ advocacy on his behalf only served to make Thielicke’s position more precarious.

Professor Althaus were to be further hindered in his work at the University of Erlangen.<sup>9</sup>

The *Spruchkammer* eventually agreed, reinstating Althaus after appeal on December 30, 1947 on the basis of the following findings:

In the opinion of the public prosecutors, no legal charge should be raised. Professor Althaus cannot be seen as a National Socialist, much less, therefore, as a staunch supporter of the tyrannical regime, particularly with respect to its racial ideology. Moreover, any legal allegation that Professor Althaus aligned himself publically with National Socialism through speeches or writings in support of the regime cannot be sustained credibly.<sup>10</sup>

The vindication does not stop there:

Moreover, the September 1933 theological *Gutachten* [i.e., the *Erlangen Opinion*] regarding the admission of Christians of Jewish descent to the offices of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*, which Althaus co-signed, cannot be regarded as an ideological statement of support for National Socialist racial politics. . . . Indeed, a clearer statement against the demand of the National Socialist state was scarcely possible at that point in time.<sup>11</sup>

Althaus had been exonerated formally, but his legacy remained in dispute. In Erlangen, this chapter in Althaus' history had been shrouded in silence until a new generation of scholars emerged in the 1960s. This new generation of Erlangen theologians, laments Gotthard Jasper, 'triggered a nightmarish public controversy' when they subjected the *Erlangen Opinion* to critical scrutiny at the 1979 *Deutscher Kirchentag*.<sup>12</sup> The debate begun in those days is open even now: there are still competing interpretations of Althaus' political attitudes and his views of the 'Jewish Question' after the fall of the Third Reich.

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<sup>9</sup> Hans Schmidt, 'Bestätigung,' July 22, 1947, NA 12.5, 1–2.

<sup>10</sup> Einstellungsbeschuß, 30 December 1947, NA 12.5, 2. The US Military Government Liaison and Security Office confirmed the *Spruchkammer*'s decision on February 17, 1948. See NA 12.5.

<sup>11</sup> Einstellungsbeschuß, 2.

<sup>12</sup> See Jasper, 'Die Friedrich-Alexander Universität,' 249–50. Ericksen also references students' demonstrations of public protest against Althaus when the truth of his entanglement with National Socialism came to light. See *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 188.



It is true, it seems to me, that Althaus was no ideological National Socialist, as the *Spruchkammer* concluded. He had always known that every government, not least National Socialism, carries the germ of evil within itself. Already in 1935 Althaus had wrestled with the moral ambiguity posed by conflicting allegiances to ordinances that are at once intact and distorted: 'I must serve my *Volk* and its state, not in paradise, but in this dire world that is badly out of joint. . . . I must represent the cause of my *Volk*, even though I know and perceive that it is also interwoven with the very evil against which I am trying to struggle.'<sup>13</sup> Although there is no explicit reference, the passage gestures toward Althaus' growing unease with the methods of the National Socialist state. In 1950, he would recollect that the moral bankruptcy of the regime had 'shattered' any claim to legitimate authority 'long before the rupture of its power.'<sup>14</sup>

Though there are hints of Althaus' growing disenchantment with the government, the issue is further complicated by his public silence. Althaus stopped his open support for National Socialism by the mid-to-late 1930s.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, after the war he seldom spoke about the 'Jewish Question' in explicit terms, though he did continue to exposit the meaning of Jewish existence theologically. But what does this silence mean? The polarity that characterises Althaus scholarship in general manifests in competing interpretations of his silence. Paul Knitter, for example, commends Althaus for his 'theological opposition against the regime [through] an

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<sup>13</sup> Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 67.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Christenheit und Staat,' *Allgemeine Rundschau: Unabhängige Tageszeitung für Nordbayern* 60:24 (1950), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Beginning about this time there is a dramatic drop-off in Althaus' political and *völkisch* writings, as Paul Knitter has noted. See 'Die Uroffenbarungslehre,' 159. The reasons for this sudden drop-off are up for debate. In any case, in the postwar period Althaus focused much of his attention on his Luther scholarship. His influential *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1963) appeared in English translation in 1966, with *Die Ethik Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1965) following posthumously in 1972.

*argumentum e silentio*.<sup>16</sup> For Jack Forstman, by contrast, Althaus' recognition of error and subsequent silence is a 'pathetically modest credit.'<sup>17</sup> Althaus himself pointed to the 'censorship of the war years, which was growing more aggressive all the time.' He further complained that, as a result of this forced silence, 'our colleagues abroad have sometimes drawn wrong conclusions.'<sup>18</sup>

At any rate, by the time of the regime's collapse Althaus found himself part of a church that could supply little explanation for what had happened over the past twelve years. The evil of the National Socialist government had been recognised too late; in the aftermath, the church stood divided on whether and to what extent its theology had been complicit in the crimes of the regime. Often the church portrayed itself and the German nation as the victims of impersonal forces beyond human control. In the words of Matthew Hockenos,

From the very outset, conservative clergymen avoided a forthright explanation for the rise of Nazism and the subsequent misery Germans were enduring in 1945 by raising the discussion above the realm of human agency and responsibility to the general European trend of secularization and the work of God.<sup>19</sup>

For his part, Althaus also resorted to the language of demonic possession and exorcism to account for the otherwise inexplicable:

The evil spirit [*der schlimme Geist*] that has reigned here for the last twelve years—whatever was evil in it should now be driven out: out of our entire public life, out of the judicial system, out of the press, out of our schools and education system. That's what the victorious powers want. That's what we ourselves want, and we are certain of this: that's what God wants, too.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Knitter, 'Die Uroffenbarungslehre,' 159.

<sup>17</sup> Forstman, *Christian Faith*, 202.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Althaus, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1953), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 54. Hockenos' study illuminates the debates within the EKD (*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*) after the war as to whether Lutheran theology should be reappraised critically in light of the Third Reich's rise and atrocities, and what direction such reappraisal should take.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Schaffe in mir, Gott, ein reines Herz' (21 May 1945), in *Der Trost Gottes*, 246.

In depicting the National Socialist years as a demonic episode, Althaus here shows symptoms of the ‘syndrome of displacing one’s own guilt’ by divesting himself and his listeners of agency—and thereby of culpability as well.<sup>21</sup> However, as we shall see below, Althaus does confront German guilt, but he does so by using the narrative of Israel as a cipher.

## **TWO | TOGETHER UNDER THE CURSE: THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE GERMAN AND JEWISH DESTINIES IN ALTHAUS’ POSTWAR PREACHING**

‘Destiny [*das Schicksal*],’ suggests Marikje Smid, had always been at the core of Althaus’ ‘sense of foreignness’ from Jews.<sup>22</sup> Destiny is what separated Jew and German in the Weimar years, when Althaus yet hoped that Germans would fulfill their divine vocation where Israel had failed. Yet his own *Volk*’s ruinous defeat in the Second World War had wrought a great and tragic irony: Germans and Jews now shared the same *Schicksal*. Although the dialectic of pathology and performance appears to wane in Althaus’ postwar dogmatic works, to which we will turn momentarily, it remains intact in the pastoral sphere, where he uses Israel’s narrative of *vocation/election*→*failure*→*curse*→*redemption* to interpret German experience in the aftermath of National Socialism’s collapse. In these materials, the pathological character of Jewish existence is still present, but is gradually eclipsed by an intensified focus on the performative function of Jews and their history.

The character of Althaus’ preaching after the fallout of the Nazi collapse is hotly contested. Whether and to what extent Althaus acknowledged his own guilt, as well as the guilt of the Christian community, is at the centre of the debate. For Gotthard Jasper, Althaus’ straightforward admission of German guilt immediately

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<sup>21</sup> See Hamm, ‘Schuld und Verstrickung,’ 16.

<sup>22</sup> See Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus*, 285.

after the war actually provided the formula that the council of the EKD would adopt for the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt in October 1945.<sup>23</sup> Jasper's charitable reading has been countered by Berndt Hamm, who notes that Althaus' sermons often deal in the language of 'fate' [*Verhängnis*] rather than of 'guilt' [*Schuld*]. In so doing, Althaus attributes the events of the National Socialist years to some external force, thereby absolving himself and others.<sup>24</sup>

Here again, though, the binary interpretive model—admission of guilt *or* self-exculpation—strains to incorporate the equivocality of Althaus' statements from the pulpit. On the one hand, Althaus owns up to German guilt in a sermon preached in Hitler's final days:

To be sure, we're not all guilty in the same measure. Perhaps the Christian church in Germany could say: we are the least guilty, we have not been complicit [*mitgemacht*]. But we don't want to speak like that . . . but now we—and I'm speaking above all for my brothers in pastoral office—perceive that our Christian powerlessness and boundedness [*Ohnmacht und Gebundenheit*] is weighing upon us not only as fate [*Schicksal*] but also as guilt [*Schuld*]. We confess that today before God and man.<sup>25</sup>

Here Althaus explicitly rejects an appeal to *Schicksal* as an explanation for Christian moral failure. Though this passage would seem to vindicate Jasper's claim over

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<sup>23</sup> Jasper, *Paul Althaus*, 319–20.

<sup>24</sup> Hamm, 'Schuld und Verstrickung,' 13–15. Jasper disputes Hamm's conclusion in *Paul Althaus* at 320. Later on, he attacks Hamm's position more stridently:

[Hamm's] overall argument of guilt and entanglement—both in its tone and as an abstract concept—implies a deeply moral condemnation of the 'entanglement' of the father-generation. In this respect, Hamm proves a typical representative of the '68-ers' generation . . . [who], without any actual life experience in the time of the reign of National Socialism, claim the right and the opportunity to naively and critically interrogate their fathers (385–86).

<sup>25</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Die gewaltige Hand Gottes' (22 April 1945), in *Der Trost Gottes*, 226. In a sermon from 1962, Althaus draws a distinction between 'collective guilt' [*Kollektivschuld*] and 'collective shame' [*Kollektivscham*]. 'Germans all feel shame, argues Althaus, for the crimes of National Socialism, but they do not all bear guilt: 'We are not all jointly-responsible for and complicit with all of the atrocities [*Grausiges*] that the German people perpetrated during the Hitler years.' See Althaus, 'Karfreitag' (20 April 1962), in *Gott ist gegenwärtig: letzte Predigten*, ed. Gerhard Althaus (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1968), 80. At the same time, he possesses a strong theology of divine judgment by which each person is held accountable for moral decisions. See Paul Althaus, 'Die Schmerzen des Gerichts,' in *Tröstet mein Volk! Grabreden unserer Zeit*, ed. Wilhelm Horkel (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1953), 167–70.

Hamm's, it is worth noting that Althaus nowhere elaborates on the specific failure of the church. Moreover, regardless of whether this sermon is a precursor to the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, the documents share a fatal rhetorical structure. Both emphasise German suffering *before* making vague allusions to German wrongdoing. More critically, neither names the primary victims of the murderous National Socialist regime and its complicit institutions: the Jews.<sup>26</sup> Hence a dichotomous interpretive model will fail to reckon with the ambiguity of Althaus' postwar attitudes toward guilt, suffering, and the 'Jewish Question.' As I suggest below, while the dialectical character of his thought does remain intact, Althaus gradually downplays the pathological threat of Jewish persons while simultaneously intensifying his focus on the performative function of Jewish existence as a means of coping with the German catastrophe.

Even with more than a decade of distance during which to reflect on his views on the 'Jewish Question' in light of the *Shoah*, Althaus still continues to interpret Jewish existence through the dialectic of pathology and performance in his postwar sermons. Though the more aggressive elements of his rhetoric do begin to fade over time, his depiction of the Jews proves remarkably stubborn. In March 1956, for example, Althaus again picks up the familiar theme of Israel's guilt for the death of Jesus. Here as before, the crucifixion represents God's 'terrible indictment [*Anklage*] against Israel,' who have rejected their true Messiah. As a result, in Althaus' ominous premonition, God is not finished with the Jews.<sup>27</sup> Most significant, however, is that Althaus again characterises Jewish existence as intrinsically

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<sup>26</sup> See Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 75–100 on the ambivalent legacy of the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Althaus, 'Die Überschrift am Kreuz' (30 March 1956), in *Die Kraft Christi: Predigten* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1958), 53–54.

pathological: 'Israel has crucified its king. Therefore now even today it wanders restless [*ruhelos*] and largely homeless [*heimatlos*] through history, sick [*krank*] on Golgotha, sick on Jesus Christ.'<sup>28</sup> Even after a war that aimed to eradicate the Jews like a virus—the details of which were public knowledge by 1956—Althaus nevertheless persists in portraying the Jews as displaced and diseased. This is the last time that he will speak so explicitly of the Jewish *Krankheit*. However, his sermons continue to evoke the pathological dimension of Jewish existence even as they ostensibly seek to correct Christian antisemitism.

Still, beginning in the 1950s Althaus' sermons generally trend away from the more hostile rhetoric of his earlier preaching about the Jews. In particular, he now emphasises the universality of human guilt for the crucifixion, a theme that had appeared in his earlier work but had been subordinated to the primacy of Jewish guilt. Here Althaus partially reverses his earlier statements by pointing to the cross as a 'monument' to German guilt and an 'indictment against us [*Anklage wider uns*].'<sup>29</sup> Yet the Jews continue to appear as the prime antagonists in the drama of salvation history. Jerusalem remains the place where prophets are murdered, the Jews remain the people who rejected Jesus, and 'Pharisee' remains a code word for legalistic and hollow religiosity.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, Althaus also begins to reflect critically on the nature of Christian antisemitism, but his analysis is tone-deaf. He notes, for instance, that the deicide libel proved especially harmful in the Middle Ages and Reformation, but does not say much about the events of his own lifetime. Surprisingly, it is under

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>29</sup> Althaus, 'Karfreitag,' 82. In Althaus' prior sermons, God's *Anklage* had been directed primarily at Israel. See, for example, 'Die Stimme des Blutes' (18 April 1930) and 'Kraft deiner Angst und Pein' (3 April 1942).

<sup>30</sup> See Paul Althaus, 'Estomihi' (28 February 1965), in *Gott ist gegenwärtig*, 150–52. Though still problematic, these statements are less aggressive than those of his 1942 sermon on the same biblical text (Matthew 23:34–39). See Althaus, 'Ein Volk, das "nicht gewollt hat!"' in NA 12.5. Althaus also associates vindictiveness with 'Phariseism' in 'Das Gebot der Stunde' (13 May 1945), in *Der Trost Gottes*, 238.

the influence of the Second Vatican Council that Althaus acknowledges a needed reform in Christian theology: 'As far as that is concerned, to speak of the people of Israel, back then or today, as the murderers of Christ is unbecoming and unchristian.'<sup>31</sup>

Despite this conscious effort to relinquish this one particular element of Christianity's antisemitic heritage, Althaus cannot in the end divorce himself from the form of discourse in which the libel is embedded. Immediately after offering the above corrective, he reverts back to the witness people mythology: 'There lies upon Israel a hex which can largely be seen up until the present day.' Consequently, he muses, Israel is still a mystery as 'dark and grave' as it was during the Weimar Republic.<sup>32</sup> So, even while he renounces explicitly a form of Christian antisemitism in which he himself had participated, the pathological dimension of his undergirding theology of the 'Jewish Question' remains largely in place. In this respect, Althaus testifies to Stephen Haynes' foreboding prediction that the witness-people myth is too deeply rooted in the Christian imagination to ever be exorcised.<sup>33</sup>

Still more striking, however, is how Althaus develops the performative function of Jewish existence in the postwar years. As we will explore presently, Althaus intensifies his focus on the constructive potential of Jewish failure and suffering (the latter of which is usually obscured or ignored) to interpret German guilt and suffering. In short, Althaus *identifies* the German and Jewish destinies by casting the events of the National Socialist years in parallel with Israel's own narrative arc of blessing, failed vocation, punishment, and restoration. In so doing, he

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<sup>31</sup> Althaus, 'Estomihi,' 152. The Second Vatican Council's deliberations on how Christians should think and speak about Jews, to which Althaus is alluding here, would be codified in *Nostra Aetate* on 28 October 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 183.

resumes a line of thought that had begun in the 1920s and extends it to apply directly to the catastrophic humiliation of the German *Volk* after the demise of National Socialism.

As I have argued throughout, Althaus envisions Germans and Jews as having parallel spiritual vocations: each has been chosen by God to fulfill a mission for the world, each has its prophets and patriarchs, each has encountered Jesus Christ directly, and the two peoples share the same fate should they fail their tasks. In this respect, Jewish existence fulfills a didactic function for Germans. At the same time, for Althaus Jews should be regarded with suspicion and held in an inclusive quarantine on account of the unique spiritual danger they pose. Althaus' postwar sermons indicate that he believes the worst has happened: the quarantine failed. Like Israel, Germans have misunderstood their vocation, abused their divine gifting, and have now fallen under the curse. In this way, the Jews, who are the perpetually diseased and dispossessed *Volk*, provide a guide for Germans who, in a dramatic reversal of fortunes, are now the ones who are war-torn and beleaguered, 'sick' [*krank*] and 'homeless [*heimatlos*].'<sup>34</sup> This interpretive strategy culminates in Althaus' explicit and direct *identification* of the German and Jewish destinies, as we shall see below.

Althaus narrates the events of the National Socialist calamity as if they are an iteration of the story of Israel. By emphasising themes of divine judgment and exilic dispersion, he aligns the German and Jewish destinies just as he had done during the Weimar and National Socialist periods. This time, however, Germans have joined Jews under God's curse. In a series of sermons delivered between the end of April

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<sup>34</sup> See Althaus, 'Die gewaltige Hand Gottes,' 227, 230.



and the beginning of July 1945, Althaus suggests that the catastrophe can only be understood theologically:

This hand that is against us—we can't be silent about it—is none other than the hand of the Judge. As the months wear on, a growing crowd of us have recognised this: a downfall like this cannot be understood or explained in merely political-military terms. Here one must look deeper. We have felt it for a long time: *the blessing of God no longer rests on our path*.<sup>35</sup>

What is most significant, however, is that he now applies to Germans the language of pathology that he had once reserved for Jews. The events of the spring of 1945, suggests Althaus, prove that Germans too have been infected with the disease of secularism—a disease borne most fatally by the Jews.<sup>36</sup> He laments, in particular, the idolatry and blasphemy of a public life 'that no longer knows anything about the fear of God . . . which is the health [*Gesundheit*] of the life of the peoples.'<sup>37</sup>

Through a series of rhetorical associations, Althaus implies that Germans—now suffering both a literal and a spiritual 'homesickness' [*Heimweh*]<sup>38</sup>—have become a mirror image of Jews. As a result of the punishment of God, '[i]n these days, many of us here in Erlangen must abandon our homes and become homeless [*heimatlos*].'<sup>39</sup> But the physical wreckage of German cities, and the subsequent displacement of German persons, is only a symptom of a more serious sickness of German spirit. Althaus reasons that the German body was susceptible to National Socialist ideology in the first place because of a widespread spiritual infection.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 224. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>36</sup> Recall Althaus' 1929 treatise *Leitsätze zur Ethik*, where he identifies Jewish *Volk* as 'the chief-bearer of the rational-critical, individualistic spirit of the Enlightenment' (81). Cf. Althaus, 'Kirche und Volkstum' of 1927, where the Jews threaten Germans with their 'demoralised and demoralising big-city spirituality' (131).

<sup>37</sup> Althaus, 'Die gewaltige Hand Gottes,' 224–25.

<sup>38</sup> 'For many of us, this applies in a literal sense . . . but in a deeper sense it is the truth for all of us: living in a foreign land! Who among us can feel at home in today's world, in today's Germany? The world in which we are standing now is not our homeland [*Heimat*]; we are in a foreign land.' See Paul Althaus, 'Heimkehr zu Gott' (15 February 1948), in *Die Herrlichkeit Gottes: Predigten zu den Festen und Festzeiten des Kirchenjahres* (Gütersloh: Rufer-Verlag, 1954), 226–27.

<sup>39</sup> Althaus, 'Die gewaltige Hand Gottes,' 224–25.

Significantly, he now uses the language of pathology with reference to German

*Volkstum*:

We stand here now before a field of rubble, and it seems to us as if the terrible destruction of our beautiful cities, their churches and other noble buildings were only the outward expression of what has happened to the German soul. The inner degeneration [*Zerstörung*] began far earlier than just the last decade. All the indoctrination of and the ideological influence on our *Volk* would not have been successful had the German soul still been healthy [*gesund*] and clear at the time.<sup>40</sup>

The remedy for this disease of godlessness is of course a return to Jesus Christ, without whom ‘the German soul will never again convalesce [*genesen*].’<sup>41</sup> In the aftermath of the Second World War, then, Althaus envisions German existence as having taken on an exilic character: it is now the fate of Germans to be sick and displaced.<sup>42</sup>

Usually, Althaus transposes German political history onto the salvation-historical narrative of Israel only implicitly: Germany had been chosen by God, failed its vocation, and is now subject to judgment. However, in a sermon of July 1, 1945 Althaus explicitly tethers German self-understanding to Jewish suffering. He opens with a narration of German experience that is stunning, given that the horrors of the death camps had already begun by the summer of 1942. Nevertheless, Althaus claims for Germans an *incomparable* history of suffering at the hands of foreign nations:

Our German lot is hard. It has never been easy. The path of the German *Volk* through history has been difficult. How much labour and pain it cost us to become a *Volk*! How our *Volk* has been torn through inner conflict, through schisms of faith, through the wars of religion! More than any other *Volk*, we

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<sup>40</sup> Althaus, ‘Schaffe in mir, Gott, ein reines Herz,’ 247. Cf. Althaus, ‘Christenheit und Staat’: ‘But indeed we do not want to forget that the total state itself in this respect signifies only the acute onset of an already long-lingering sickness [*lange schleichenden Krankheit*]’ (2).

<sup>41</sup> Althaus, ‘Schaffe in mir, Gott, ein reines Herz,’ 249.

<sup>42</sup> In a 1951 sermon, Althaus speaks of the ‘curse’ [*Fluch*] weighing upon the German nation as God’s punishment for following a ‘false path.’ The effect of the curse is that Germans, their ‘health’ [*Gesundheit*] having been sapped, are now ‘driven from their beloved homeland.’ See ‘Durch Gott gedemütigt’ (21 November 1951), in *Die Herrlichkeit Gottes*, 242–44.

have been the prey and the pinball of foreigners [*Beute und Spielball der Fremden*]. . . . A path rich in suffering! Our *Volk* bears its scars and wounds in body and soul.<sup>43</sup>

Now it is Germans who are the wandering and hunted *Volk* rather than Jews, whom Althaus had earlier called ‘the pinball [*Spielball*] among the great peoples of the world.’<sup>44</sup> Like Israel, Germans now strain under God’s punishment and, also like Israel, their reprobation is incomprehensible and ostensibly inexplicable, a ‘mystery’ hidden deep in the counsel of God.<sup>45</sup> Althaus’ provocative fusing of Jew and German climaxes in a cry of despair:

Are we Germans a people of misfortune among the other peoples—like the Jews, their counterpart [*Gegenbild*]? A people under God’s curse [*Ein Volk des Fluches Gottes*]? Has the Creator, in his wrath, made us only for disaster? Does he have only dark plans for us?<sup>46</sup>

Years before, Althaus had warned that, should Germans contract the diseased spirituality of the Jews, they would consequently share the Jewish fate of perpetual dispersion.<sup>47</sup> His premonition had come true: Germans had become the mirror image of the Jews—*Germans had become Jews*—a second people wandering under the curse.

Yet as dire as the German situation is, the final word is still one of hope. For Althaus, Jews and Germans share an analogous election—and thus they suffer an analogous reprobation. But they also share a future redemption that God intends to fulfill, regardless of how hopeless present circumstances may seem. Althaus succors

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<sup>43</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Gottes Gedanken mit uns’ (1 July 1945), in *Der Trost Gottes*, 251.

<sup>44</sup> See Althaus, ‘Die schwere Zeit im Lichte der Ewigkeit’ (28 June 1931), 64.

<sup>45</sup> Althaus, ‘Gottes Gedanken mit uns,’ 252.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 252–53. Althaus elsewhere intimates that the German nation has fallen under the ‘curse’ [*Fluch*] of God on account of the many ‘abominable sins’ of the *Volk*, but that God overcomes this curse with the ‘victorious power of love’ (see ‘Das Gebot der Stunde,’ 235).

<sup>47</sup> ‘And should we throw away the Gospel, we would never be able to rid ourselves of the sting. Our *Volk* would then be right there next to the “eternal Jew,” a second figure wandering restless and cursed through history’ (Althaus, *Christus und die deutsche Seele*, 32). In 1942 Althaus had warned that if Germans sit in judgment over Jews, ‘the rejected ones,’ then ‘we ourselves have become Jews’ (see ‘Ein Volk das “nicht gewollt” hat!,’ 3).

the sick German soul by way of a direct and unsophisticated appeal to a word of Hebrew prophecy (Jeremiah 29:11).<sup>48</sup> He does pause briefly to consider whether such a hermeneutical technique is appropriate or whether it is ‘pure arbitrariness . . . an all too cheap means of numbing our pain that still does nothing to alleviate our suffering in the least.’ Finally, however, he concludes that ‘this was not said to us first, but to the *Volk* of the Old Covenant, [but nevertheless] this word applies to each person and in each time since Jesus.’<sup>49</sup> In this move, Althaus claims for Germans the unique promise made to the people of Israel. Jewish existence, therefore, continues to fulfill a performative and constructive function even in spite of the fact that it has infected German existence. The narrative of Israel holds out hope that the German story can too be healed.

In the meantime, however, it is an abiding shame that binds Jew and German together. The fact that God continues to preserve Israel for a future encounter with Jesus Christ, argues Althaus, proves that there is no human guilt beyond the scope of divine forgiveness. In a departure from his prior Good Friday preaching, he now emphasises the *solidarity* of Jews and Germans in their entanglement with atrocity and the terrible miscarriage of justice. At the end of his life Althaus absolves Jews of guilt for the crucifixion, and, I suspect, not coincidentally:

What the spiritual leaders of the *Volk* did back then does not signify any kind of collective guilt [*Kollektivschuld*] for the whole *Volk*, just as little as the horrible crimes of Auschwitz signify that for us—we are all ashamed [*beschämen uns alle*] of those crimes, but we don’t all bear guilt for them.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> ‘For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope’ (NRSV).

<sup>49</sup> Althaus, ‘Gottes Gedanken mit uns,’ 253. He had also applied this passage to interpret Germany’s military fortunes during the war. See his ‘Meditation über Jeremiah 29,11,’ NA 13:4.

<sup>50</sup> Althaus, ‘Estomihi,’ 152.

The question of guilt, then, is never straightforward. Immediately after the war, Althaus introduces the concept of ‘historical guilt’ [*geschichtliche Schuld*]: a failure of nerve or lapse into ‘error and powerlessness.’ This kind of moral breakdown—into which Althaus seems to place both Golgotha and Auschwitz—is indeed cause for regret, but it is not a source of guilt ‘in the strictest sense.’<sup>51</sup> Just as ordinary Jews did not crucify Jesus, says Althaus, ordinary Germans did not murder the Jews. So, in this bizarre calculus, Germans and Jews, while not exactly guilty, do bear a shared weight of historical shame.

It must be said that Althaus does signal his awareness of the attempted destruction of the Jews, but usually attributes those atrocities to the National Socialist leadership.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, by 1952 Althaus reverses the Good Friday rhetoric he had used for so many years by naming the Jews, for so long the *victimisers* in the passion narrative, as the *victims* of Germans:

‘The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to me from the earth,’ cries out for atonement, for retribution, for God’s vengeance for innocent life that has been murdered. The blood cries out. There’s no use in throwing dirt on it, covering it with sand, burying it. They’ve planted birch trees on the mass graves at Katyn—it’s just like us people to do that!—but the blood of Katyn still cries out and will not fall silent. The blood of the Jews, Poles, Czechs murdered [*hingemordet*] by German hands still cries out, whether we want to hear it or not.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> ‘We can mourn deeply our error and powerlessness [*Irren und Ohnmacht*] in an hour of decision which demanded powerful political action, but we cannot indict ourselves [*sich anklagen*] on that account. . . . Error and powerlessness can exist without guilt. They can bring historical shame on us, but they do not bring personal shame before God in every case. They are weakness, but they are not evil [*Sie sind Schwachheit, aber nicht Bosheit*].’ See Paul Althaus, ‘Schuld,’ *Prisma* 1:2 (1946), 6.

<sup>52</sup> See also Althaus, ‘Gottes Gedanken mit uns,’ 251–52 and Althaus, ‘Amnestie?,’ 879–80.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Althaus, ‘Abels Blut und Christi Blut’ (11 April 1952), in *Die Herrlichkeit Gottes*, 101. It is worth noting that Althaus does distance himself from Nazi parlance by using the word *hingemordet* (‘murdered’) instead of the Party’s more sterile term, *vernichtet* (‘exterminated’), which is also the word used for the destruction of animals or inanimate objects. At the same time, even while Althaus acknowledges the genocidal crimes of the National Socialist regime, he couches them among the atrocities of other nations. He seems to categorise the murder of the Jews as an act of war comparable to the Russian government’s mass murder of Polish nationals at Katyn or the British and American bombing of Dresden in February 1945. Again he stresses that it is the ‘superiors and leadership [who] gave the murderous orders’ who will have to reckon with the guilt of these crimes in particular, even though all humanity has participated in the ‘spirit of Cain.’

Significantly, however, he appears to see no substantial connection between toxic anti-Judaic theologies and the murder of Jewish persons. Even in the face of unequivocally evil treatment of Jewish persons by *Germans*—a people he believed to be Christian in their very essence—he can muster only ‘collective shame.’ In other words, Althaus does not consider Auschwitz ultimately to demand a total overhaul of his theology of the ‘Jewish Question.’

The problem with Althaus’ post-*Shoah* preaching is *not* that he consults the Hebrew Scriptures as sources for Christian reflection and self-understanding; Christians, as has been acknowledged in a recent exchange between Christian and Jewish authors, do have a legitimate claim to the so-called Old Testament.<sup>54</sup> Rather, difficulties ensue when Althaus continues to offer a distorted and chimerical account of Jewish performance. And, as this survey of his pastoral writings has shown, while he appears to surrender the more aggressive elements of his *völkisch* theology in the aftermath of the *Shoah*, he has not fully rehabilitated with the undergirding structural logic: that is, the dialectic of pathology and performance. On the contrary, though he relinquishes his most obviously antisemitic vocabulary, *the very form of the discourse* he continues to use does an equally serious violence to Jewish persons. Namely, Althaus has minimised Jewish suffering by using it to interpret German suffering. Berndt Hamm stresses the problems posed as Althaus overlooks the ‘millions of murdered Jews’ with an exclusive focus on German pain:

The problem with the Althausian way of preaching, which has so much to say about the suffering of the German people and its Christians and so little to say

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<sup>54</sup> Ann Conway-Jones, an Anglican practitioner, has rightly observed that Christianity is a movement which took the Hebrew Bible with it as it developed out of Second Temple Judaism. As a result, Christians are ‘equally entitled’ to make use of Hebrew scripture. In a response to Conway-Jones, Jewish scholar Sebastian Selván not only agrees with this premise, but proposes the retrieval of *interpretatio christiana* as a promising resource for ‘eas[ing] some of the tensions in the relationship between Jews and Christians.’ See Conway-Jones, ‘Contempt or Respect? Jews and Judaism in Christian Preaching,’ *The Expository Times* 127:2 (2015), 64–65 and Selván, ‘The Bible in Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Perspective,’ *The Expository Times* 128:1 (2016), 7–8.

about its perpetration [*Täterschaft*], lies not in that Althaus does not have an idea of the culpable entanglement that both his Erlangen hearers and he himself had . . . but rather *how* he speaks of it . . . how he characterises the guilt as passive omission . . . how he unconsciously trivialises it . . . how he as a theologian allowed guilt to disappear again and again behind an imposed fate. . .<sup>55</sup>

These motifs—chiefly Althaus’ use of Jews as a key to German self-understanding—are consistent with his attitudes toward the ‘Jewish Question’ beginning in the 1920s, as I have argued throughout. But Althaus’ failure is not merely a sin of omission. Not only has he obscured the gross atrocities against the Jews, he has taken the ‘comfort of God’ [*der Trost Gottes*] promised to Israel and given it to Germans.

### THREE | THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARADOX: ALTHAUS’ PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP TO JEWS

Althaus had maintained his dialectical theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ in his pastoral exposition of the relationship between Jews and Germans, though he came to emphasise the performance of Jewish existence over its pathology. These public comments may reflect the same unresolved tension in his own personal attitudes toward Jews. Robert Ericksen reports a striking instance of Althaus’ ‘personal aversion towards Jews and Jewish culture’ as remembered by Althaus’ son, Gerhard. When Gerhard questioned his father on the subject in the mid-1950s, Althaus simply replied, ‘You have not experienced the Jews.’<sup>56</sup> This account is, on the surface, difficult to reconcile with Lowell Green’s personal testimony on the same subject: ‘Althaus’s [*sic*] son, Gerhard, told me in July 1998 that his father had expected him to disregard the rules against fraternization with non-Aryans and to be friendly with the Jewish children at school.’<sup>57</sup> These narratives, though anecdotal, are

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<sup>55</sup> Hamm, ‘Schuld und Verstrickung,’ 15, 17.

<sup>56</sup> Gerhard Althaus conveyed this account directly to Ericksen. See Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler*, 109 and Ericksen, ‘Assessing the Heritage,’ 25–26.

<sup>57</sup> Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler*, 150.

indicative of a phenomenon that goes beyond Althaus' own particular case: the public/private paradox.<sup>58</sup> Althaus had made strident comments about the danger of Jews and Judaism in his capacity as a public servant, though there is evidence that he could—and did—set aside his personal prejudice against Jews to participate in acts of basic human decency.

It is telling that much of Althaus' defence before the *Spruchkammer*—and his vindication within sympathetic scholarly narratives—rests on his personal gravitas. In the immediate aftermath of Althaus' dismissal, Helmut Thielicke, who by that time had established a reputation as a valiant opponent of National Socialism, explained Althaus' initial positive reception of the government as an ironic flaw of personality. He writes,

Subjectively speaking, my explanation for his trivialising interpretation of National Socialism is that Paul Althaus by nature possesses a generally optimistic attitude toward life, which makes him inclined to see the positive both in people and in things. It was precisely this quality for which we felt so grateful as his students. This optimism, however, which is a gift not to be underestimated for an educator, threatened to become his downfall in the interpretation of National Socialism; for a man of the inviolable personal integrity of a Paul Althaus, furthermore, it must have been almost impossible to imagine the potential evil of National Socialism.<sup>59</sup>

Four decades later, Thielicke would remember Althaus as a well-meaning man who tragically fell victim to his own 'innocent naiveté [*unschuldsvoller Naivität*].'<sup>60</sup>

Likewise Wolfgang Trillhaas, another of Althaus' former students, offers a benign perspective on his mentor's political attitudes, arguing that his uncritical theological method failed him in the 'testing of the spirits'—that is to say, Althaus' indecisive

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<sup>58</sup> Von Kellenbach has observed how perpetrators constructed amnesty campaigns based on 'personal decency' that aimed to dissociate public acts of duty from private morality. See *The Mark of Cain*, 167–77.

<sup>59</sup> Thielicke, 'Aeusserung' 2.

<sup>60</sup> Thielicke, *Zu Gast*, 85. In the end, Thielicke judges that Althaus' personal integrity is unassailable; he was a good man with a 'pious heart . . . whose character was beyond reproach, at least as far as his motives were concerned' (see *Notes from a Wayfarer*, 73–75).



nature ‘played a prank on him.’<sup>61</sup> These verdicts are echoed by Walther von Loewenich, a colleague of Althaus on the Erlangen theology faculty who cites his personal encounters with Althaus in order to vindicate him: ‘From 1938, Althaus, as far as I can see, no longer expressed anything positive about the Third Reich in public. He was privately [*innerlich*] finished with it long before the military catastrophe, which I know from many conversations.’<sup>62</sup>

Loewenich’s comments exemplify the difficulty in reconciling Althaus’ public and private personas. As we have seen, Karlmann Beyschlag has gone so far as to conclude that one must have ‘personally experienced’ Althaus’ ‘spiritual charisma’ in order not to totally misunderstand him.<sup>63</sup> But how are we to fit together Althaus’ public comments of strident nationalism and xenophobic anti-Judaism with his private reservations about National Socialism and its crude Jew-hatred? The dilemma is compounded by the scarcity of documentary evidence; the private-Althaus remains, with the exception of the personal testimony of sympathetic colleagues and friends, largely inaccessible. It is challenging, for instance, to verify the claims made by an anonymous deposition from 1947: ‘Professor Althaus, both in Erlangen, where he has worked since 1925, and in every place where he has given speeches—in the biggest cities in Germany—is known as a not-National Socialist [*Nicht-Nationalsozialist*].’<sup>64</sup> The anonymous author testifies that Althaus routinely criticised the regime in private conversations and academic lectures as he ‘led the

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<sup>61</sup> Trillhaas, *Aufgehobene Vergangenheit*, 85. Trillhaas credits Althaus with helping to launch his own academic career.

<sup>62</sup> Walther von Loewenich, *Erlebte Theologie*, 169. Loewenich remarks that criticism of the Erlangen theological faculty has been partially fair and partially not in the years since the war. Regarding Althaus in particular, he concludes, ‘despite his occasional sympathetic statements, he had been no National Socialist.’

<sup>63</sup> Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie*, 184.

<sup>64</sup> Anonymous Deposition, 1947, NA 12.5, 1. Emphasis in the original.

struggle against the totalitarian concept of National Socialism.’<sup>65</sup> The deposition stresses Althaus’ private opposition to the regime:

In particular, at the ‘open evenings’ that Professor Althaus regularly held at his home for his students, much open criticism of the ‘Third Reich’ was discussed, according to the statements of the students involved. Specifically this on July 20: Professor Althaus, according to the report of a certain student Düfel, on that occasion voiced ‘that Hitler’s survival signifies judgment over the German people.’ This Düfel, who stills studies in Erlangen now, added this: it is only on account of the ability of the students to keep a secret that Professor Althaus did not share the same fate as the Munich Professor Kurt Huber—namely, being executed by firing squad.<sup>66</sup>

Most significant for my purposes, however, is the deposition’s description of Althaus’ personal relationship to Jewish persons. The likelihood that Althaus had consistent personal contact with the Jewish community is low. Historically, as Jasper has noted, substantially fewer Jews studied in Erlangen compared to other parts of the country, despite the presence of a large Jewish population in the nearby village of Fürth.<sup>67</sup> Still, there is testimony that Althaus advocated for Jewish theology students at the university:

Althaus was regarded as the special confidant [*besonderer Vertrauensmann*] of non-Aryan theology students and of those theologians who were judged politically suspicious and were persecuted on account of their attitude toward the church-politics of the Third Reich. So testifies the non-Aryan theologian Fritz Fraenkel, now a student in Göttingen (Stumpfebiel 2). So too the politically persecuted young theology candidate Karl Heine (Erlangen, Henkestraße) and Horst Kerstan (Erlangen, Frankestraße 4). In May 1942, as the lawyer Dr. Mensing (Wuppertal) can attest . . . Althaus wrote an expert report [*Gutachten*] in favor of several female schoolteachers from Bremen who had taken in members of the Jewish community who were designated to be deported to the East. . . . Althaus has exposed himself to accusation on account of this report.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. These claims are difficult to verify, as Althaus’ lecture notes are not extant.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 2. Emphasis in the original. The author is here referring to Kurt Huber, professor of psychology in Munich and member of the White Rose group, who circulated tracts in opposition to National Socialism. Huber was, in fact, sentenced to death by guillotine, not executed by firing squad. See Inge Scholl, *The White Rose: Munich 1942–1943*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. and trans. Arthur R. Schultz (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983).

<sup>67</sup> See Jasper, ‘Die Friedrich-Alexander-Universität,’ 256. This state of affairs is due, he speculates, in part to a ‘clearly perceptible antisemitism’ in Erlangen.

<sup>68</sup> Anonymous Deposition, 3. Töllner also recounts Althaus’ efforts to assist a theology student with a Jewish father. Despite problems with the Gestapo, Althaus is said to have made arrangements for the student to

The particularity with which the deposition names Althaus' non-Aryan contacts lends the account a credibility not to be overlooked. Moreover, there is documentary evidence to suggest that Althaus did use his influence as a university professor to intervene on the behalf of the schoolteachers to which the deposition alludes. On this occasion, as we shall see below, Althaus was able to dissociate his open mistrust of Jews from the demands of Christian conscience. In so doing, he illustrates the ambiguity that characterises much Christian antisemitism, according to which Christians could maintain a dissonance between their public attitudes toward 'the Jews' and their personal dealings with, or on the behalf of, Jewish persons.

In May 1942, pastor Heinrich Kloppenburg, a leader of the *Bekennende Kirche* in Oldenburg, issued an urgent appeal to Althaus to intervene on the behalf of four Bremen schoolteachers who had been under arrest since November 1941 for providing Jewish families with clothing and supplies. With the teachers—who, it must be noted, were not themselves Jewish—now facing trial to determine whether they violated their civil servant loyalty oaths, Kloppenburg contacted Althaus with the defense counsel's request for a theological expert opinion [*Gutachten*] in response to the legal indictment. Given the substantial geographical distance between Bremen and Erlangen, it is significant that Kloppenburg contacted Althaus; this suggests, perhaps, that Althaus had a tacit reputation for resisting the racial laws of the regime. At the same time, however, Kloppenburg also assures Althaus that the teachers acted only out of Christian conscience, not out of personal affinity for Jews: 'The defense counsel emphasises that it is important to establish that this contact

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sit his ecclesial exams for the Bavarian *Landeskirche* and to have helped the student secure a vicarship in Alsace. See Töllner, *Eine Frage der Rasse?*, 65.

with Jewish families was not a matter of personal friendship (one of the schoolteachers explained that, at the beginning, she found the Jewish woman she met very unpleasant, personally speaking), but simply a matter of Christian obligation.’ The teachers, he adds, ‘have not caused a public scandal as no one noticed that they were with these families.’<sup>69</sup>

Althaus’ response to Kloppenburg is revealing on a number of levels: though he equivocated, ultimately he agreed to advocate for the teachers while leaving the prejudicial framework of the legal proceeding intact. On the face of it, he appears to offer his unreserved support for the teachers, and by extension, for the Jewish families they assisted:

I was moved as I read your letter and its attachment. It goes without saying that I see the matter exactly as you do and I have no doubt that the schoolteachers . . . acted christianly, that is, they acted in accordance with the Word and Spirit of Jesus. The allegation that has been issued by the Court only serves to reflect once again the entirely dire situation of the church.<sup>70</sup>

However, the logic of Althaus’ interpretation of the schoolteachers’ actions rests not in protecting the dignity of these Jews *as Jews*, but on defending the legal rights of *Christians* who are Jewish:

According to my judgment, the civil-service oath of loyalty to the *Führer* has not been affected by their actions; for it is a matter neither of criticism nor of a thwarting of the stipulations mandated by the *Führer*, but only that one allows the involved parties, even in this difficult situation, to feel that they belong to the Christian church. Because the *Führer* has expressly recognised the Christian churches as such in the message he delivered on 21 March 1933, his political struggle against Jewry’s danger to the *Volk* [*Volksgefahr des Judentums*] cannot be interpreted in such a way as to deny membership of baptised Jews to the Christian church. It is out of this public, indisputable membership that the conduct of the teachers resulted—out of this and nothing else.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Heinrich Kloppenburg to Paul Althaus, 12 May 1942, NA 12.5, 1–2.

<sup>70</sup> Althaus to Kloppenburg, 16 May 1942, NA 12.5, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. The speech to which Althaus alludes was delivered by Hitler on the ‘Day of Potsdam’ (21 March 1933); two days later the ‘Enabling Act’ was passed. In his speech before the *Reichstag* on 23 March 1933, Hitler acknowledged both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches as vital factors for the preservation of German culture and promised to respect the place of the churches in German life.

Strikingly, Althaus does not challenge the *Führer's* 'political struggle against Jewry's danger to the *Volk*.' As we have seen, this political struggle is something of which he seems to have approved in concept, even while he demonstrated a degree of unease with the government's methods. *Secular Jewry*, manifest as the continuing menace of *Weltjudentum*, remains a live threat, but that, he argues, is not the issue at hand here, since the Jews in question belong to a Christian community.<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, says Althaus, the teachers should be exonerated because they assisted these families not because of, but rather in spite of their Jewishness—that is, the teachers intervened on the behalf of fellow Christians who are Jewish. 'In the first place,' he reasons,

it is a matter of a legal determination that the *Führer's* Yes to the church of March 1933 has not been withdrawn . . . [and] that there has never been a requirement that the church may only have Aryan members; that each Jewish family belonged to the *Stephanigemeinde* accordingly; and that the action of the teachers has its ground and authority from this fact.<sup>73</sup>

Though Althaus had argued that Jewish pastors should be disqualified from leadership, he always maintained that Jewish Christians must have a place within the Germans churches.<sup>74</sup> Here again we see Althaus' implicit trust of the state and its alleged promise to respect the autonomy of the German churches, although he hints that this trust may be misplaced. This being the case, he suspects that the defense will stand a better chance of success on the basis of strictly juridical arguments because

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<sup>72</sup> In the 1968 edition of his Romans commentary, which was published posthumously, Althaus would state that 'the Jews must be seen with different eyes than all other peoples, not only as "world Jewry" [*Weltjudentum*], but as "Israel."' See Althaus, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Das Neue Testament Deutsch 3, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 121–22. Significantly, Althaus affirms that there is such a thing as *Weltjudentum*—a libel that had been a staple of National Socialist propaganda—but that this is not the *only* way that Jews should be conceived.

<sup>73</sup> Althaus to Kloppenburg, 1. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>74</sup> See 148–53 above.

‘[i]f I were to argue before the court on purely on the grounds of Christian ethics, it would be like speaking into a void.’<sup>75</sup>

Although Althaus ends the correspondence on a note of equivocation, he did eventually issue a *Gutachten* that was presented by the defense counsel at the schoolteachers’ trial, as reported by the chief defense attorney, Karl Mensing.<sup>76</sup> Mensing later testified that Althaus’ *Gutachten* defended the actions of the teachers by pointing to the state’s legal recognition of the DEK:

Just like members of all other peoples and races, so too Jews who have confessed faith in Jesus Christ and been baptised are members of the Christian church. In Germany, Jewish Christians have been, up till now, members of the *Landeskirchen* incorporated into the DEK. As of today, the state has not contested that. It has never been made compulsory for the DEK, and its associated national churches, to exclude baptised Jews from its ranks.<sup>77</sup>

Althaus did support the teachers’ actions on theological grounds—‘It is essential to the Gospel message that the church of God founded by Jesus gathers together people of all Völker in the unity of faith and love’—but he ultimately chose to privilege the legal argument.<sup>78</sup> In the end, the Reich Administrative Court [*Reichsverwaltungsgericht*] reinstated the teachers to their positions, albeit with a twenty percent reduction in salary for three years. The teachers, according to Mensing, had Althaus to thank for this positive outcome.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Althaus to Kloppenburg, 2. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>76</sup> See Karl Mensing, ‘Bescheinigung,’ August 19, 1947, NA 12.5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 2. Althaus had recommended this defence strategy in his 1942 correspondence to Kloppenburg:

Most likely—I repeat—the juristic argument would have the greatest chance of success: the Jews concerned, in accordance with the laws which have long been in effect in Germany, belong to the *Stephaniegemeinde*—and everything else results from this. Then indeed the court can still . . . explain: it is a scandal that this law should still apply; Jews may not belong to the churches of the DEK!—but nevertheless, the teachers have protection in a legal status that has not yet been repealed (Althaus to Kloppenburg, 2. Emphasis in the original).

<sup>78</sup> Mensing, ‘Bescheinigung,’ 1.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 2.

That Althaus is willing to act on behalf of Jewish Christians, albeit indirectly, does not prove, as Lowell Green has intimated, that he is a philosemite.<sup>80</sup> What it does prove, however, is that Christian attitudes toward Jews are often ambivalent and that it was possible for Christian theologians to hold their public denigration of Jews and Judaism in tension with their felt Christian obligation to human decency. André Fischer has articulated the intrinsic dissonance of Althaus' theoretical views on the 'Jewish Question' as a tension between 'fascination with Judaism' and 'disgust with Judaism.'<sup>81</sup> In terms of his practical dealings with Jews, Althaus exhibits a similar ability to hold together incongruous theological tendencies: he remains suspicious of 'Jews' as an abstraction but this theological antipathy does not always translate to a concrete ethic. In this respect, Althaus is not unlike Karl Barth, who took tangible measures to assist Jews despite a personal distaste for them, which he once described as an 'allergic reaction.'<sup>82</sup>

More broadly, this dissonance is consistent with what we know about rescuers in general. It is difficult to demonstrate a direct causal relationship between a rescuer's worldview and a decision to assist Jews. The common link between

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<sup>80</sup> See Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler*, 144–50.

<sup>81</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 534–35.

<sup>82</sup> Barth described it as follows in a letter to Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt dated 5 September 1967 [in *Karl Barth, Letters 1961–1968*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey Bromily (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 261–63]:

I am decidedly not a philosemite, in that in personal encounters with living Jews (even Jewish Christians) I have always, so long as I can remember, had to suppress a totally irrational aversion, naturally suppressing it at once on the basis of all my presuppositions, and concealing it totally in my statements, yet still having to suppress and conceal it. Pfui! is all that I can say to this in some sense allergic reaction of mine. But this is how it was and is. A good thing that this reprehensible instinct is totally alien to my sons and other better people better than myself (including you). But it could have had a retrogressive effect on my doctrine of Israel.

Comments such as these certainly complicate Barth's legacy with respect to his relationship to Jewish persons. However, Mark Lindsay has shown that, despite his remarks to Marquardt (and similar remarks to Eberhard Bethge), Barth had consistent and sustained contact with Jewish colleagues, was conversant with contemporary trends in Jewish philosophy and theology, and took concrete measures to protect Jewish persons fleeing from National Socialist persecution, including opening his home to Jewish refugees. See Mark Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus: Karl Barth's Theology of Israel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 21–35.

rescuers is not necessarily a special concern for Jews, but rather, as Oliner and Oliner have shown, ‘their capacity for extensive relationships’—that is, a heightened awareness of their personal responsibility to others.<sup>83</sup> In Althaus’ case, however, there is little evidence that he defended *Jews as Jews*. In every instance—whether for non-Aryan students of theology or for Jewish-Christian families—Althaus intervened on the behalf of *Christians who happened to be Jewish*. In this regard, this episode actually serves to illustrate the consistency of Althaus’ theology of the ‘Jewish Question.’ His support for Jews as Jews had always been limited, but he had also always been open to the possibility of a Jew’s genuine conversion to Christianity.

### CONCLUSION | A TENSION UNRESOLVED

Within more sympathetic circles of interpretation, there has been an inclination to depict Althaus as a well-meaning but misguided man. Hetzer captures this phenomenon succinctly: ‘[Although] Althaus clearly positioned himself theologically and politically, there still remains a tendency in the historiography of theology after 1945 to see Althaus not as a player in history, but as a victim [*Opfer*] of his own ideas.’<sup>84</sup> However, throughout his career he constructed a dialectical—yet conscious, sophisticated, and coherent—theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ in which Jews perform critical theological functions precisely because of the pathological nature of their existence. In many respects, Althaus maintained this dialectical

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<sup>83</sup> To summarise:

The help [rescuers] extended to Jews was rarely the result of a perception of Jews as particularly worthy, but was rather a reflection of their characteristic ways of determining moral values and actions. For some rescuers, helping Jews was a matter of heightened empathy for people in pain. For others, it was due to internalized norms of social groups to whom they were strongly attached. And for a small minority, it was a question of loyalty to overriding autonomous principles rooted in justice or caring.

See Samuel Oliner and Pearl Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 249.

<sup>84</sup> Hetzer, ‘*Deutsche Stunde*,’ 241.



theology even after the *Shoah*. Indeed, even while he begins to downplay the pathology of Jewish existence, Althaus actually intensifies the performative dimension of Jews and their scriptures in the pastoral sphere, where Jews continue to function as hermeneutical keys for German self-understanding. This performative function climaxes in his direct identification of the German and Jewish destinies. From the pulpit, Althaus casts Jews (especially as depicted in biblical narratives) as fellow travelers of Germans.

That Althaus could suspend his abstract theological suspicion of Jews in his personal life does not nullify the dialectic of pathology and performance. Moral decisions are complex, and it is likely that Althaus, when confronted with the demands of his Christian conscience, set aside his public denigration of and personal antipathy toward the Jews. Perhaps the most we can say here is that Althaus did not resolve this tension in his personal life. There is little evidence of his interaction with Jews as Jews, yet it remains the case that he considered baptised Jews as genuine neighbors entitled to Christian charity. For our wider purposes, however, this episode may indicate that Althaus' theology of the 'Jewish Question' does not always have living, breathing Jews as its referent. As both his post-*Shoah* pastoral works and his dogmatic and exegetical writings imply, the *idea* of Jews and their histories is sufficient to fulfill the performative function of Jewish existence without dependence on actual Jewish persons. As I now argue below, when Althaus sought to reform his dogmatic and exegetical thought in light of the cataclysmic genocide of Europe's Jews by de-emphasising their pathological nature, his theology (perhaps inadvertently) deprived contemporary Jewish existence of its *telos*.

## CHAPTER VII | THE COLLAPSE OF THE DIALECTIC: DOGMATIC AND EXEGETICAL WORKS

In light of this closeness and commonality [between Jews and Christians] it is, for Christianity, endlessly puzzling and depressing that Israel, in general, has closed itself off from Jesus Christ. With all of its ‘zeal for God’ (Rom. 10:2), Israel has missed the very thing to which God’s whole history with it has been pointing.

Paul Althaus, *Der Brief an die Römer* (1968)

### INTRODUCTION

After a prolonged encounter with ‘the demons of barbarity,’ immediately after the war Althaus called Germans to ‘national penance [*deutsche Volksbuße*].’<sup>1</sup> Only rarely, however, does he name the victims of his nation’s sins. Still, although he has difficulty expressing guilt or responsibility for theological error with particularity and in concrete terms, he does seem to have recognised that the enterprise of Christian theology and ethics could not simply carry on as it had before. Through to the end of his career, Althaus recalled the ‘appalling misuse of all patriotic words and ideals’ and the ‘madness’ of the Nazi years.<sup>2</sup>

With the dust of the collapse still settling, Althaus acknowledged too that the rise and fall of the National Socialist movement necessitated a critical reassessment of the state of Christian ethics: ‘Under the impact of the German catastrophe we must reappraise our previously represented concepts of state and politics from the ground up.’<sup>3</sup> Here Althaus seems to gesture toward a radical overhaul of—or at least a sober re-examination of—his theological and ethical programme. Yet, as we explore below, the extent to which Althaus’ dogmatic formulations of his dialectical theology

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<sup>1</sup> Althaus, ‘Das Gebot der Stunde,’ 233–36.

<sup>2</sup> See Paul Althaus, ‘Klopfet an. . .’ (18 June 1956), in *Die Kraft Christi*, 229.

<sup>3</sup> Althaus, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 5. Cf. Althaus, ‘Christenheit und Staat,’ 1.

of the ‘Jewish Question’ changed after the ‘German catastrophe’—and, with that, what continuing purpose contemporary Jews might have—remains unclear.

## ONE | THEOLOGICAL ETHICS AND DOGMATICS

As we have noted above, Althaus sees that Christian ethics, dogmatics, and exegesis have been called into question by the events of the National Socialist years. The demonic nationalism of the age, compounded by the genocide of Europe’s Jews, is, he concedes, cause for self-conscious reflection on the assumptions, aims, and methods of Christian theology. Significantly, however, his summons to theological reconstruction is not meant as a retraction. Explaining his revisions to the 1953 edition of *Grundriß der Ethik*, he is almost defiant on this point:

Of course, many sections [from earlier editions] do not recur here or have been shaped into an entirely new form. This should not be misunderstood as a theological confession of guilt [*ein theologisches Schuldbekenntnis*] in view of earlier editions. That which has been omitted from this edition, for example, on the doctrine of the *Volk*, the state, and politics, remains, on the whole, something of which I am not ashamed even today—even though it may have been somewhat unsatisfactory and one-sided in isolated places.<sup>4</sup>

In October of that same year, Althaus made a similar comment to Karl Barth in response to Barth’s uncharitable appraisal of Althaus’ theology of *Volkstum* in the *Church Dogmatics*. ‘Perhaps now,’ he writes, ‘I will write a short essay in which I show, autobiographically, how I came to accept the concept of the “*Volk*.” Alas, even today I don’t feel any embarrassment about that.’<sup>5</sup>

These excerpts are pregnant with implications for Althaus’ ethical enterprise after the *Shoah*. In the first place, we must note that Althaus does acknowledge

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<sup>4</sup> Althaus, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 6. Paul Knitter cites these ‘retractions’ as proof that Althaus gradually came to ‘criticise and correct’ his political theology: ‘One cannot emphasise strongly enough that Althaus corrected the ideological application of his *Uroffenbarungslehre* and theology of orders’ (‘Die Uroffenbarungslehre,’ 157–59). This claim, I think, overstates the case for reasons that I will argue below.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Althaus to Karl Barth, 25 October 1953, in *Paul Althaus, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner: Briefwechsel 1922–1966*, ed. Gotthard Jasper (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 102–03. Emphasis in the original. Hereafter referenced as *Briefwechsel*.

(reluctantly) the inadequacy of his prior theological commitments, and there are discernible shifts in his ethical thought after 1945.<sup>6</sup> In light of this, it is all the more significant that, with respect to the ‘Jewish Question,’ he does not quite recant, nor does he attempt to offer a more constructive theology of the *Volk* or of Jews and Judaism. Rather, the ‘Jewish Question’—as a clearly defined ethical issue—more or less disappears from Althaus’ dogmatic works from this period; explicit theological reflection on the meaning of contemporary Jewish existence is scarce in his postwar writings. The reason for this, I suggest, is that since Althaus knows he can no longer characterise Jewish persons as strains or contagions in a post-*Shoah* context, he is unable to uphold the performative function of Jewish existence because it had always been tied to the pathological dimension of Jewish existence. When pathology and performance are no longer linked, in other words, the dialectic collapses.

In any event, Althaus resumes the task of ethics just where he had during the Weimar Republic: within the orders of creation.<sup>7</sup> In most respects, his ethical system remains unchanged, albeit there is perhaps a more pronounced awareness, with the National Socialist years still fresh in his mind, of the orders’ susceptibility to idolatry and tyranny.<sup>8</sup> In light of his admission to the occasional ‘one-sidedness and inadequacy’ of his ethical positions, it is not surprising that Althaus omits any explicit reference to the ‘Jewish Question,’ though I argue that he still has the Jews partially in view. However, even though he eliminates his earlier theology of the Jews from his section on the *Volk*—which, it seems, is a tacit retraction of his more

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, Gotthard Jasper has argued that Althaus returned to more orthodox expression of Lutheran political ethics after ‘his processing of the experience of the National Socialist catastrophe.’ In particular, Althaus no longer speaks as of the state as the guarantor of the *Volk*’s historical destiny and he radically modifies his theology of war toward a more classically Lutheran theory of just war. See ‘Die Zweireiche-Lehre,’ 49.

<sup>7</sup> See 64–77 above on Althaus’ *Leitsätze zur Ethik* (1929).

<sup>8</sup> Althaus, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 110–12.

virulent rhetoric—the ethical framework within which Althaus first constructed his theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ remains virtually untouched. In short, the problematic theology of the *Volk* through which Althaus had approached the meaning of Jewish existence and the Aryan Paragraph in the first place is still intact. The only thing missing is the Jews.

As I have argued above, Althaus’ theology of *Volkstum* proved problematic as he coped with the question of the implementation of the Aryan Paragraph in the DEK. By rooting one’s national belonging in the ‘primal origination’ [*Urzeugung*] of the *Volk*, Althaus had alienated pastors of Jewish descent by definition. Even as he writes in fascism’s destructive wake, however, Althaus continues to locate *Volkstum* in ‘commonality of soil [*Gemeinsamkeit des Bodens*], that is, of living-space [*Lebensraum*], and of blood,’ despite the ways in which these concepts had been toxified by Nazi ideology. The result is once again the exclusive ‘we-consciousness’ [*Wir-Bewußtsein*] of the *Volk*, a concept he had developed in the 1930s.<sup>9</sup> Althaus here approaches the question of belonging and loyalty within the same theological matrix of ‘ethnic classification’ [*die Gliederung der Menschheit in Völker*] he had always used, as if nothing had changed.

The *Konfliktgesetz* is also implied here again, though the concept seems to have been sapped of some of its pathos: in a shift in emphasis from his earlier work, he stresses the tragedy of ethnic segregation over its grandeur.<sup>10</sup> What is especially striking, though, is that Althaus can persist in assuming a homogenous and static concept of the German *Volk*—indeed of any *Volk*!—given the massive migration

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 124. Compare identical language in *Völker vor und nach Christus* (1937), 5–6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 124–25. Cf. Althaus, *Grundriß der Dogmatik*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1958), where Althaus stresses that the *Kampfes*-, *Verdrängungs*-, and *Todesgesetzes* are consequences of sin, though they are also a means of God’s grace (177–80). See also *Die christliche Wahrheit: Lehrbuch der Dogmatik*, vol. 2 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1948), where Althaus connects conflict with the tragedy of human transience (187–88).

within Europe that had begun before his lifetime and had intensified during and after the Second World War. This tendency, perhaps, most clearly reveals the extent to which Althaus' Germany was an 'imagined community' all along.<sup>11</sup> Yet on the whole he continues to situate the *Volk* within an essentialising racial taxonomy that remains unmodified after the *Shoah*.<sup>12</sup>

This unmodified ethical framework yields the same theology of the church with which Althaus had addressed the Aryan Paragraph in 1933. He had recommended that Jews be restrained from pastoral office on the basis of a segregationist ecclesial model that is still in place twenty years later. The logic of the *Erlangen Opinion* remains discernible:

. . . in its proclamation and embodiment the church seeks to enter into the type [*Art*] and organic life-form of the *Volk*. For the sake of this task of the church, it makes sense and is correct for the church to structure itself in alignment with the classification of humanity into peoples and states in the form of folk-churches. . . . The dangers of such an arrangement do not mean that it is not correct.<sup>13</sup>

The danger to which Althaus alludes is the total insulation of folk-churches. As a safeguard against this danger he invokes ecumenical association, just as he had during the National Socialist years.<sup>14</sup> Although 'classification and segregation' [*Gliederung und Sonderung*] are the natural rules according to which individual church communities develop, Althaus emphasises the catholicity of the church

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<sup>11</sup> The concept is Benedict Anderson's. See *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> See Althaus, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 127–29. It must be noted that, later in the text, Althaus recognises that all human beings share a common origin 'in Adam.' That is to say, there is a unity of humanity that transcends 'the limits of biological type' rooted in humanity's relationship to, and estrangement from, God (156–67). Cf. Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, vol. 2, where he affirms the fundamental unity of the human race, but also points to the 'fact' that the peoples are, spiritually speaking, 'foreign from one another and far from one another' (86–87).

<sup>13</sup> Althaus, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 169. Cf. Althaus, *Grundriß der Dogmatik*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 237–40. Just as the human race has a fundamental unity but is nevertheless divided into peoples, so the church shares a spiritual catholicity but is divided into individual churches and confessions. See *Die christliche Wahrheit*, vol. 2, 305–07.

<sup>14</sup> See 120–22 above.

universal—yet not through ethnically-integrated churches but through ‘brotherly community’ between self-contained folk-churches.<sup>15</sup> This ecclesial model—wherein the church is still implicitly subordinated to the *Volk* and which left no room for pastors of Jewish descent in pulpits of the DEK—is supported also by Althaus’ exegetical work of the postwar era.<sup>16</sup>

But here the ‘Jewish Question’ is most conspicuous by its absence; Althaus makes no direct reference to the unique problems posed by Jewish existence in the 1953 edition. However, I suggest that Althaus still has the Jews in view as he comments on the ‘imperative of loyalty to the *Volk*’:

We are to cultivate and pass on [the life of the *Volk* that God has entrusted to us]. We bear responsibility for the physical and spiritual inheritance of our *Volk*. We are obligated, as much as we can, to preserve its biological health [*Gesundheit*] and to struggle against the danger [*Gefahr*] of its biological degeneration . . . [we bear the responsibility] to cultivate its language, type, and customs, so long as they are healthy, as well as to fend off licentious foreign infiltration [*willkürliche Überfremdung*].<sup>17</sup>

Althaus here joins the concept of *Überfremdung*—which he had associated explicitly with Jews during the Weimar era—to pathological language (*Gesundheit*) to trigger rhetorical associations with Jews. In so doing, he continues to share an antisemitic vocabulary used by National Socialist propagandists to justify ethnic cleansing.<sup>18</sup> Thus in his clearest articulation of the task of Christian ethics after the German

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<sup>15</sup> Althaus, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 173.

<sup>16</sup> Compare Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, *Der Brief an die Galater*, ed. Paul Althaus, Das Neue Testament Deutsch 3, ed. Paul Althaus and Gerhard Friedrich (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962): ‘To the extent that the church itself is an ordinance, naturally it must respect the differences between people’ (31–32). Here Beyer and Althaus reproduce Althaus’ earlier arguments that spiritual unity in Christ does not abolish biological or societal differences between persons outside the walls of the church.

<sup>17</sup> Althaus, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 125. On the threat of Jewish *Überfremdung*, See Althaus ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 116 and Althaus, ‘Gott und Volk,’ 100. In *Leitsätze zur Ethik*, Althaus had depicted the Jews as ‘the predominate force in the struggle against the historical ties, customs, and traditions of our people’ (54). At the conclusion of §36 (‘Das Volk’) of the second edition of *Grundriß der Ethik*, Althaus recommends ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ ‘Gott und Volk,’ and *Völker vor und nach Christus* for further reading.

<sup>18</sup> The word *fremd* and its cognates, including *Überfremdung*, had figured predominately in Nazi propaganda. See Robert Michael and Karin Doerr, eds., *Nazi-Deutsch/Nazi German: An English Lexicon of the Language of the Third Reich* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 403.

catastrophe, Althaus hints at the lingering danger posed by the Jews, but he no longer mentions the constructive promise that he had formerly linked with that danger.

## **TWO | EXEGETICAL WORKS**

The predominance of Althaus' most strident statements on the 'Jewish Question' had always appeared in the context of situational works: sermons, speeches, and essays of social commentary. During the Weimar and National Socialist eras, Althaus connected his views of contemporary Judaism to biblical exegesis and dogmatic formulation only in isolated instances, but his dialectical approach to the question in his situational writings was always animated by scriptural exegesis. In the section below we investigate whether and how his views on the nature and purpose of Jewish existence change in his postwar works of exegesis. We can discern in the textual evidence traces of Althaus' dialectic of pathology and performance after the *Shoah*, yet those traces grow faint by the end of his career. In these materials, Althaus reconsiders exegetical tropes that are openly denigrating of Jewish persons while leaving untouched the problematic assumptions about Jewish existence behind those tropes. Yet whereas the performative function of Jews and their scriptures remains clear in Althaus' pastoral context, as we have seen, the dialectic of pathology and performance collapses in his exegetical writings.

Althaus published the first edition of *Der Brief an die Römer* in 1932. As we have seen, in this commentary he depicts Israel's spiritual history in ways that are at once consistent with classical Christian exegesis and yet deeply antisemitic. It is in an excursus to his commentary on Romans 9–11 that *der ewige Jude* first appears to disrupt the peace and interrupt the ethnic solidarity of his host societies.<sup>19</sup> A great

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<sup>19</sup> See 93–94 above.



deal had transpired between the first edition of the commentary and a revised version released in 1962—not least the genocide of Jews in Europe. Althaus is of course aware of this, but at this point he does not appear to consider the *Shoah* as an impetus for a re-evaluation of his exegetical approach to the ‘Jewish Question.’ The excursus on Romans 9–11 is retained almost verbatim in the 1962 edition. Althaus considers the ‘Jewish Question’ an unresolved issue even after the war, and he still problematises what is left of the Jewish presence in Germany as a riddle.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the ‘eternal Jew’ continues to wander the earth, plaguing the nations as an ‘open wound.’<sup>21</sup> Althaus’ views are especially alarming in context as he characterises Jewish existence as pathological and viscerally repulsive nearly twenty years after the *Shoah*.

However, Althaus revised the commentary heavily between the 1962 and the 1968 editions, as Martin Meiser has noted.<sup>22</sup> In the 1968 edition, which was published posthumously, the excursus has been redacted dramatically. This revised exegetical work reflects his growing awareness of the problematic nature of some of his prior comments on the ‘Jewish Question.’ The most striking feature of this edition is therefore its omissions, as Althaus has removed explicitly pathological language. The Jews are no longer maligned as parasitic. Moreover, he now shows consciousness of Christianity’s troubled relationship to Judaism:

Paul’s pain over Israel is at the same time the sorrow of Christianity as a whole. With shame Christianity will confess that it, as the witness to Jesus

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Althaus, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Das Neue Testament Deutsch 3, ed. Paul Althaus and Gerhard Friedrich (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 88, 111.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 111. The language also appears in the 1959 edition. See Paul Althaus, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Das Neue Testament Deutsch 6, ed. Paul Althaus and Gerhard Friedrich (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), 111.

<sup>22</sup> See Martin Meiser, *Paul Althaus als Neutestamentler: Eine Untersuchung der Werke, Briefe, Unveröffentlichten Manuskripte und Randbemerkungen*, Calwer Theologische Monographien A:15 (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1993), 239–40.

Christ, is complicit [*Mitschuld trägt*] in Israel's closedness [to Christ] on account of its conduct toward the Jewish *Volk*.<sup>23</sup>

Christian attitudes are judged problematic insofar as they prevent Jews from becoming Christians, but Althaus stops short of a full recognition of the harmful effects of Christian anti-Judaism. As Meiser observes, 'Christian complicity for the unbelief of Israel is admitted, but he does not admit that Christian anti-Judaism prepared the way for the Holocaust.'<sup>24</sup> At the same time, Althaus' anguish over the puzzling reprobation of Israel signals an intensified focus of the mysterious relationship between Jews and Christians.

In the 1968 edition of *Der Brief an die Römer* Althaus exposts the connection between Israel and the church more extensively than elsewhere in his writings. Here again, though, he continues to identify the Jews as a riddle to be solved. As before, he argues that all secular attempts to deal with the 'Jewish Question' will fail because Judaism can only be understood in light of its fulfillment in Christianity:

It has been forgotten for a long time that the Jews must be seen with different eyes than all other peoples, not only as 'world-Jewry' [*Weltjudentum*] but as 'Israel,' the *Volk* which God has called to and gifted with a distinctive history with Jesus Christ, with the Gospel, and with the church.<sup>25</sup>

But who is Israel? Althaus here distinguishes between *Weltjudentum*—the secular Jewry that is a threat to other peoples—and Israel, the people whose history is critical for Christians. Here, it seems to me, Althaus takes care not to conflate what he sees as dangerous secular Jews with the salvation-historical entity of Israel, with whom the church is bound. But it is precisely the spiritual kinship between Jews and

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<sup>23</sup> Althaus, *Römer* (1968), 122.

<sup>24</sup> Meiser, *Paul Althaus als Neutestamentler*, 240.

<sup>25</sup> Althaus, *Römer* (1968), 121.

Christians that makes the ‘Jewish Question’ so bedeviling. Even in the face of obvious theological disagreements, Christianity and Judaism are blood-relatives: Jesus and the apostles were Jews, Christianity began as a Jewish movement, and Jews and Christians share common scriptures and pray to the same God. ‘We are insolubly bound together with Israel,’<sup>26</sup> he claims—and yet Jews and Christians remain estranged. At any rate, for the first time Althaus stresses solidarity between Jews and Christians.

But despite Althaus’ efforts to repair the antisemitic elements of his exegetical writings, he lapses reflexively into the anti-Judaic discourse he had used for nearly four decades. For example, he persists in depicting Jews as antagonists in the story of salvation-history:

In light of this closeness and commonality [between Jews and Christians] it is for Christianity endlessly puzzling and depressing [*unendlich rätselvoll und bedrückend*] that Israel, in general, has closed itself off from Jesus Christ. With all of its ‘zeal for God’ (Rom. 10:2), Israel has missed the very thing to which God’s whole history with it has been pointing.<sup>27</sup>

These comments cohere with his hermeneutical approach to Jewish religious practice in general. As Meiser has shown, Althaus’ attitudes toward Jewish law are consistently negative. With reference to Hermann Wolfgang Beyer’s commentary on Galatians, which Althaus re-worked after Beyer’s death, Meiser writes that the two scholars ‘confuse Pharisaical piety with its caricature’:

Beyer and Althaus know that Paul was bound to a ministry of Jewish conversion out of love for his own Jewish *Volk*, but they do not draw any implications for the theological appraisal of Jewish piety from that fact; Jewish piety instead appears essentially as self-assertion against God [*Selbstbehauptung gegen Gott*], as compulsion, and as pure externalism [*reine Äußerlichkeit*].<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 121–22.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> See Meiser, *Paul Althaus als Neutestamentler*, 331–33. The commentary in question is Beyer, *Der Brief an die Galater*, ed. Paul Althaus (1962). See footnote 16 above.

In their confusion about the nature of true piety, Jews fulfill yet another didactic function by testifying (unknowingly) to the futility of misplaced ‘zeal for God.’ The Law itself, then, is for Althaus a distortion of the ‘divine command’—that is, of God’s original directive to humanity. Through the Fall, the command to love God and neighbor has devolved into a convoluted system of prohibitions.<sup>29</sup> Though the Old Testament does have value for Christians, the legalism of Jewish spirituality remains a constant threat to disfigure the Gospel with its pedantic hair-splitting.<sup>30</sup>

This chimerical (mis)characterisation of Jewish piety is part of Althaus’ wider hermeneutical strategy within which the Old Testament is retained on account of its positive theological significance but is at the same time regarded with a certain apprehension.<sup>31</sup> In this respect, the Jewish scriptures again parallel the function of Jewish persons. As in his earlier writings, Althaus basically affirms the place of the Old Testament as Christian scripture, as he always had done, though he does so with a degree of ambivalence. Jesus himself, he argues, both accepted and rejected the authority of the Old Testament. So too with the New Testament writers Paul and John, who simultaneously denounce the legalism of the Old Testament and yet claim it as Christian scripture. But this ambiguity surrounding the authority of the Old Testament for Christians is due to the book’s conflicting nature:

It becomes the holy book of Christians and remains the holy book of anti-Christian Judaism [*antichristliches Judentums*]. . . . The true understanding of the book is disputed by both. Israel stands against Jesus on the ground of the Old Testament; Christianity stands by Jesus with the Old Testament and stands by the Old Testament with Jesus. This is only possible because,

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<sup>29</sup> Althaus thus makes a threefold distinction: Command—Law—Gospel. Law is a postlapsarian disfiguration of the Divine Command. The Gospel then frees the Divine Command from the entanglements of the Law and restores it. See Althaus, *The Divine Command*, especially 12–21.

<sup>30</sup> See Paul Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit: Lehrbuch der Dogmatik*, vol. 1 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1947), 241–45.

<sup>31</sup> For Althaus the Old Testament’s relationship to Christian faith and practice is threefold: it exercises authority, it has pastoral significance, and it represents a danger. See Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, vol. 1, 227–43.

religiously speaking, the Old Testament is no unified book, but actually bears conflict within itself and is at war with itself [*mit sich selber kämpft*].<sup>32</sup>

Thus for Althaus it is Christians and not Jews who know how to decipher the enigmatic prophecies of the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>33</sup> This is in part because the Old Testament (unlike its Greek counterpart) is a mysterious admixture of divine truth and human error. Though the prophets, for instance, testify to the Gospel hidden within the Law, ‘there are parts of the canon in which we hear only the voice of a man, the speech of Judas.’<sup>34</sup> The provocative allusion to Judas is striking but not surprising, as Althaus had earlier argued that, at its worst, the Old Testament demonstrates ‘an expression of humanity which erected the cross of Christ.’<sup>35</sup>

For all its dangers, however, the Old Testament remains indispensable not only for Christians, but for Germans as well. Even though, in a historical sense, the narratives belong exclusively to the people of Israel, the Hebrew Scriptures reach into the present:

This God of the Old Testament, through the witness of the chroniclers and prophets, *brings us before himself* as our God, the God of primal revelation, the one living God of all humanity. Through the account of a bygone folk-history [*vergangene Volksgeschichte*], which is not ours, we are seized by the reality of the one God, who is present for each person and in every time and who deals with us today in our own history.<sup>36</sup>

Even though ‘non-Jews’ [*Nicht-Juden*] are free from the parochial laws of Israel, they are bound to an existential decision before the God to whom the laws attest.

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<sup>32</sup> Althaus, *Grundriß der Dogmatik*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 68. Althaus had spoken of the conflicted nature of the Old Testament nearly identical terms in 1927’s ‘Kirche und Volkstum.’ Cf. Althaus, ‘Das Alte Testament,’ 14f.

<sup>33</sup> ‘We Christians, in our faith in Jesus as the Christ, are certain that the Jewish *Volk*’s “No” to Jesus in the name of the Old Testament is also a “No” to the actual truth of the Old Testament’ (*Grundriß der Dogmatik*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 68). Althaus had made similar arguments in ‘Die Frage des Evangeliums an das moderne Judentum’ (1930).

<sup>34</sup> Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, vol. 1, 243. Elsewhere, Althaus remarks that ‘late Judaism had to no small extent surrendered the prophetic heritage and had become a religion of law—one which in many ways anticipated the features of Roman legalism’ (*The Divine Command*, 19–20).

<sup>35</sup> Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, vol. 1, 233.

<sup>36</sup> Althaus, *Grundriß der Dogmatik*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 69. Emphasis in the original.

Here as before, Althaus alludes to the performative function of Jewish scripture, by which Christians in general and Germans in particular can interpret their own experience.<sup>37</sup> The figures of the Old Testament have pastoral significance as fellow travelers on the way of faith who illustrate what life under God's 'tutelage' is like.<sup>38</sup> This performative capacity remains critical for pastoral reasons, but the ongoing dogmatic significance of Judaism or Jewish persons is far less certain.

Indeed, by referencing the 'bygone' folk-history of Israel, Althaus hints at the inertness of contemporary Jewish practice. In a memorable phrase, he declares that 'Christ is the end of the Messiah' [*Christus ist auch des Messias Ende*], by which he means that Jesus of Nazareth has confounded Israel's misplaced expectations and frustrated its nationalistic aspirations.<sup>39</sup> By this logic, the Jews, having fundamentally misunderstood their divine vocation, have also missed the climax of their own history. Though the Jews will once more reckon with Jesus Christ in an undetermined eschatological future, their existence is deprived of purpose in the meantime. This kind of exegesis rests on a deeply anti-Judaic assumption: that, since its rejection of Jesus, Judaism has been stripped of its *telos*.

In a significant shift in emphasis from the earlier editions of his Romans commentary, Althaus therefore intimates that it is only in relationship to Christianity—that is, as Christianity's basis—that Judaism performs any constructive function. Christians do continue to wait for the miraculous 'home-coming' of Israel, but meanwhile the church has replaced Israel as the active player in God's plan of salvation.<sup>40</sup> Whereas the 1932 edition of the Romans commentary had emphasised

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<sup>37</sup> See 128–38 above.

<sup>38</sup> Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, vol. 1, 229, 240–41.

<sup>39</sup> Althaus, *Grundriß der Dogmatik*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 72–73. Cf. Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, vol. 1, 230–32.

<sup>40</sup> Althaus, *Römer* (1968), 122.

the threefold performative function of the Jews—to symbolise the openness of history, to disrupt the ethnic solidarity and segregation of their host societies, and to witness prophetically to the coming Kingdom of God—Althaus drops that line of argumentation from the 1968 edition. The church now fulfills the tasks originally intended for Israel *in every respect*:

Whatever is finally valid for Israel is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his church both now and in the end [*jetzt und am Ende*]. After Jesus Christ, Israel no longer occupies the place of the one people of God amongst and for the sake of the peoples of the world. The people of God is now, as Paul testifies, Christianity made up of Jews and non-Jews. Israel's salvation-historical vocation for which it was elected has now been transferred to Christ and his church as the true Israel. Israel as a *Volks*, according to the witness of the apostle Paul, has its salvation-future [*Heilszukunft*], but it no longer has any special salvation-historical mission.<sup>41</sup>

Though his exegesis had always implied that the church has taken over the role of Israel, Althaus had previously equivocated on the question of total supersessionism: Israel's history is unique and there are 'indirect' functions that Israel alone continues to perform in the sphere of salvation-history. Here, however, the church is able to fulfill *all* of Israel's functions. The effect is that Israel, once divested of the admittedly problematic vocations that Althaus had assigned to it in earlier iterations of his exegetical work, is essentially deprived of *any* constructive purpose. That is to say, Althaus cannot conceive of Judaism as a living religion with any positive value in its own right. Meiser puts it succinctly: 'Judaism is seen only as a historical counterpart to Paul, but not as a present and living counterpart to contemporary Christianity.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 123. Althaus had characterised the church as the 'true Israel of God' in earlier editions of the commentary, but he had always maintained that Israel retains an indirect eschatological function that the church does not share.

<sup>42</sup> Meiser, *Paul Althaus als Neutestamentler*, 333. Compare the comments of Charlotte Klein on this Christian hermeneutical tendency: 'Theologians are scarcely aware of how far their theories, views, and attitudes have influenced and continue to influence Christians in their relations with Jews alive today. . . . But in the purely theological-exegetical works Jews and Judaism are discussed now as before as if they formed an abstract

Specifically, Althaus argues that large sections of the Hebrew Scriptures exist only as a backdrop against which the Gospel can shine: '[These texts] have no positive purpose for Christianity, but only the negative purpose of a foil and a counter-play [*Folie und Widerspiel*] to the Gospel.'<sup>43</sup> I have argued above that in Althaus' thought the purpose of Jewish persons mirrors the purpose of Jewish scripture. If I am right about that, then it follows that Jews themselves have been reduced to inanimate foils that exist only to cast the liberating truth of Christianity into sharper relief. In other words, Judaism is in its death throes; it is decaying, but has just vitality enough to poison Christians with its fatal legalism. In this way, Althaus' articulation of the religious history of Israel actually doubles as Judaism's eulogy.

## CONCLUSION | JUDAISM TRAPPED BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

Of course, Althaus is not the first Christian theologian to sentence Judaism to a living death. Many had already condemned the Jews to the zombielike existence captured vividly in Friedrich Schleiermacher's unforgettable image of Judaism as an '*unverweslichen Mumie*,' an embalmed corpse 'long since dead' yet resistant to decomposition.<sup>44</sup> Over a century later, Martin Niemöller picked up where Schleiermacher left off: '[The Jewish people] can neither live nor die, because it is under a curse that forbids it to do either.'<sup>45</sup> So too here: even when Althaus appears to redact overtly antisemitic exegesis in light of concrete crimes against Jewish persons, he has difficulty articulating what continuing purpose Jews might have. This

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something, existing in a vacuum, and not as a living factor in the world today; not as if it were a question of millions of human beings living among us' (*Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology*, 13).

<sup>43</sup> Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, vol. 1, 233.

<sup>44</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799; repr., Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek, 1900), 209. See also Amy Newman, 'The Death of Judaism in German Protestant Thought from Luther to Hegel,' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61:3 (1993).

<sup>45</sup> Niemöller's sermon excerpt is reproduced in Gutteridge, *Open Thy Mouth*, 103–4.



trend illustrates just how intimately pathology is linked to performance in Althaus' dialectical theology of the 'Jewish Question.' Because he no longer speaks of the danger of Jewish existence as he had in earlier editions of *Der Brief an die Römer*, he can no longer speak of the constructive theological functions that result from that danger.

After the *Shoah*, Althaus realised that it was untenable to continue to characterise Jewish persons as perpetually displaced irritants or secularising contagions, but he can find no alternative productive purpose for Judaism except as to serve passively as the root of the Christian faith and to wait for its 'final history with Jesus Christ.'<sup>46</sup> His theology of the 'Jewish Question' had once been complex, but in its place emerges the bland and unsophisticated anti-Judaism characteristic of his era.<sup>47</sup> The final product, I suggest, is a theology in which the Jews only truly *live* on the pages of scripture and in the Christian imagination. This exegetical development manifests, as we have seen, also in Althaus' postwar preaching, where the story of Israel—but not necessarily Jewish persons themselves—provide a key constructive resource for Christian and German self-understanding. In the final analysis, despite Althaus' efforts to decode the meaning of their existence through his dialectic, the Jews remain a riddle unsolved: absent pathology, the dialectic collapses. Hence contemporary Jewish persons are neither pathological nor performative, but only 'endlessly puzzling and depressing.' But if he no longer roams the earth as *der ewige Jude*, it is unclear exactly what an actual Jew *does*.

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<sup>46</sup> Althaus, *Römer* (1968), 122.

<sup>47</sup> For a representative work, see Martin Noth, 'The Rejection of Christ,' in *The History of Israel* (London: A&C Black, 1960). Noth theorises that with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, 'Israel thereby ceased to exist and the history of Israel came to an end' (439).

**SECTION IV INTRODUCTION | THE IRONIES OF ALTHAUSIAN THEOLOGY**

The ‘unmastered trauma’ of the *Shoah* is a reality that has confronted, and continues to confront, both Jewish and Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> The extent to which the genocide of European Jews demands a total reconstruction, or deconstruction, of Christian claims about God and his relationship to the Jewish people remains open for debate.<sup>2</sup> For Althaus, though, the demonic idolisation of the *Volk* and monstrous crimes against the Jews did not prove forceful enough motivation to reinvent his theological system. To quote the blunt analysis of Walther Mann: though Althaus might have changed minor details by the end of his career, his mature theology of the orders of creation is built essentially of ‘the same old stuff.’<sup>3</sup>

As for the ‘Jewish Question’ in particular: the results of Althaus’ efforts to ‘take back’ [*zurücknehmen*] his harmful theological constructs are mixed. Though he does surrender the most obviously antisemitic of his theological tropes, as we have seen, the dialectic of pathology and performance remains largely intact in the postwar years. Althaus maintains the dialectic more strongly in the pastoral sphere, though he de-emphasises the pathological pole while simultaneously intensifying the performative promise of the Jewish story for German self-understanding. In his works of dogmatics and exegesis, though, he eventually comes to relinquish the pathological dimension of Jewish existence almost completely. In so doing, however,

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<sup>1</sup> The language is Richard Rubenstein’s. See *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 81–122.

<sup>2</sup> For a helpful survey on both Jewish and Christian responses to the *Shoah* as a theological event, see ‘Facing the *Tremendum* (I): The *Shoah* and Modern Jewish Thought,’ and ‘Facing the *Tremendum* (II): The *Shoah* in Modern Christian Thought,’ in Mark Lindsay, *Reading Auschwitz with Barth: The Holocaust as Problem and Promise for Barthian Theology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Walther Mann, *Ordnungen der Allmacht: Paul Althaus der Jüngere über die Ordnungen*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Luthertums 7 (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1987), 135–36.

he simultaneously eliminates the *telos* of contemporary Jewish experience along with it.

At the same time, there is a certain dissonance by which Althaus could suspend his theological mistrust of and personal distaste for Jewish persons when his Christian conscience demanded it. Though Althaus, so far as I can tell, seems only to advocate for *Christian* Jews and not for Jews as such, his personal life reflects a similar ambivalence to his public remarks regarding the ‘Jewish Question.’ I suspect that his personal engagement with living Jewish persons (such as Jewish theology students in Erlangen) may be a faint indication of an underlying promise in his theology that has been obscured its more explicitly anti-Jewish elements. The very fact that Althaus’ approach to Jewish existence is dialectical means that his theology could have taken a less xenophobic shape. In other words, it is the very ambivalence of his theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ that suggests it could have been performed otherwise.

In chapter eight, I argue not only that the radically ethno-centric theology that Althaus ultimately enacted is not a necessary and inevitable outcome of Lutheran ethics, but also that it is not a necessary and inevitable outcome of *Althausian* ethics. Namely, I mean that Althaus’ theology itself possesses mechanisms to prevent a dangerous over-emphasis on the ordinances of *Volk* and nation: specifically, a sober grasp of the sinfulness and the penultimate nature of the orders. Where Althaus overrides these mechanisms, he does so against his better judgment. The crowning irony of his dialectical theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ is that Althaus considers the Jews themselves as the means to prevent the idolisation of the *Volk*. Nevertheless, it must be said that even while Althaus sometimes does use the theology of the orders of creation [*Schöpfungsordnungslehre*] to envision trans-national ecclesial and civil

communities, he just as often deploys the doctrine in support of a segregated societal structure, as he does, for instance, in the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph*.

On this account, some critics—chiefly Karl Barth—have seen the doctrine as irredeemable, an example of the intrinsic weakness of Lutheran social ethics. This claim is debatable. But if we are to gesture toward the repair of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*, we will need to look beyond Althaus to do it. The extent to which Althausian theology has the capacity to ‘make good again’ [*wiedergutmachen*] is, in the end, severely limited. Yet as I argue below, there are resources within the Lutheran tradition—specifically in the thought of Althaus’ contemporaries Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rudolf Bultmann, and Hermann Sasse—to configure the doctrine of creation in such a way as to combat the ethnic taxonomising that plagues Althaus’ theology. That enterprise is the subject of chapter nine.



## CHAPTER VIII | SELF-DEFEATING TENDENCIES IN THE ALTHAUSIAN THEOLOGY OF VOLK

While Althaus certainly knows otherwise—that is, about what the Lutheran concept of vocation really means—he formulates the concept of ethnic-vocation in such a way that the purest representative of romantic individualism could not have expressed it any more pristinely.

Emil Brunner, *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen* (1932)

### INTRODUCTION

Any attempt to rehabilitate Althaus' legacy is to some extent also an attempt to rehabilitate Lutheran political and social ethics. As critics have pointed out, the widespread failure of the German churches to overcome the jingoism and antisemitism of the Third Reich may signal a weakness intrinsic to Lutheran theology itself. Yet it was Ernst Troeltsch—writing decades before Hitler, the *Kirchenkampf*, and the *Shoah*—who impugned Lutheran social teaching most poignantly for its 'patriarchal-agrarian' ethic that 'glorifies authority for its own sake.' From the beginning, argues Troeltsch, Lutheranism had been totally dependent on the prevailing political power, 'like some frail sapling.'<sup>4</sup> As a result, its theology manifests in a social ethics with no critical apparatus—what Troeltsch calls the 'social impotence of Lutheranism.'<sup>5</sup> The Lutheranism Troeltsch depicts, defined by feeble quietism and slavish obedience to authority, is the version most vulnerable to criticism. Indeed, it is striking how prescient his critiques can seem in retrospect, as the events of the 1930s and 1940s exposed Lutheranism at its most flawed. At first blush, Althaus seems to fit Troeltsch's caricature of Lutheranism almost exactly—

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<sup>4</sup> See Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, vol. 2, trans. Olive Wyon (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1931), 516, 529–30, 542–45. The German edition, *Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*, appeared in 1912.

<sup>5</sup> For Troeltsch, this 'yielding spirit' is at the very core of Lutheran thought. See *ibid.*, 568.

especially in that by glorifying the life of the *Volk* Althaus appears to have ‘submit[ted] unconditionally to the external life of [his] political sphere.’<sup>6</sup>

## ONE | CHALLENGING A TROELTSCHIAN CLICHÉ

It is possible, on the other hand, that Althaus (and the tradition to which he belongs) may have been the victims of ‘clichéd thinking,’ owing largely to Troeltsch’s influence.<sup>7</sup> Althaus in particular is something of an easy target for those who are already predisposed to suspicion of Lutheran theology, which is why he has been subject to so much criticism in Barthian circles. As Karlmann Beyschlag has noted astutely, Althaus has often been treated as a ‘symbolic figure for all that is theologically objectionable and politically reprehensible.’ This, in turn, means that he has been chronically misunderstood.<sup>8</sup>

However, here I argue that the critical breakdown in Althaus’ socio-political theology generally—but especially his theology of the *Volk* as set within his doctrine of the orders of creation—poses a real problem for Lutheran ethics, but it does not represent a fatal flaw. The shape that his *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* took is but one permutation among several Lutheran (and Reformed) options; nevertheless, it is an expression of Lutheran thinking with which the Lutheran theologian must reckon.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 516. Friedrich Mildenberger, in his exposition of the Lutheran Confessions, also admits that the Augsburg Confession lends itself to ‘a strong affirmation of the world and its actual structures.’ For Mildenberger, this is an unfortunate byproduct of the apologetic tone of the document, drafted by Melancthon to distance Lutherans from other Protestant movements, especially the Anabaptists, who were threatening the civil order. See *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Robert C. Schultz, trans. Erwin L. Lueker (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 126–27.

<sup>7</sup> In his careful study, Uwe Siemon-Netto has sought to overturn clichéd readings of Lutheran theology (such as that of Troeltsch), showing historical examples where Lutherans resisted unjust authority not in spite of but rather on the basis of their Lutheran convictions. See *The Fabricated Luther: The Rise and Fall of the Shirer Myth* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie*, 183.

<sup>9</sup> For an account of Althaus’ theology of the orders of creation within the context of its development and reception within the wider Lutheran tradition, see Mann’s *Ordnungen der Allmacht*. Mann’s study shows the diverse ways in which Lutheran theologians have interpreted the doctrine, especially since the so-called ‘Luther Renaissance’ at the turn of the twentieth century. Mann also wrestles with the doctrine’s entanglement with National Socialist ideology, concluding ultimately that the doctrine had developed long before the emergence of the party’s race platform. Nevertheless, it is possible, even likely, that the doctrine could have developed ‘into a National Socialist theology of the orders, or something like it’ (57).

With the benefit of hindsight, we know that Althaus' theology of the orders could not withstand the ethical challenges posed by the Third Reich, but it also drew criticism from Althaus' contemporaries at the time. Some proposals for the doctrine's reconfiguration came from unlikely sources, especially the Swiss Reformed theologian Emil Brunner, but Althaus' fellow Lutherans also offered compelling alternatives that do not show the same vulnerability to xenophobic distortion.

With that said, however, I further argue that Althaus is already aware of the ever-present threat of the demonic disfiguration of the orders, and thus already aware of the dangers to which his interlocutors point. That is to say, the theology of the *Volk* that reached its climax in the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph* is the inevitable outcome neither of Lutheran ethics nor of Althausian ethics. I suggest here that Althausian ethics actually has mechanisms in place to prevent the totalisation and idolisation of the *Volk*. To anticipate: Althaus himself put checks into place to counteract the distortion of Christian theology through wild *völkisch* fanaticism. However, at various points he overrides these checks through *self-defeating tendencies*, which cause him to violate certain principles of his own theology.

On account of these inconsistencies in applying his own system, it is therefore possible to read Althaus against himself. There is evidence, in other words, in Althausian theology of a trans-ethnic social vision, albeit a vision that manifests in segregation. His thought, therefore, can only be rehabilitated so far. It is on this point that his theology ultimately falls short and that we must rely on alternatives offered by his Lutheran contemporaries Bonhoeffer, Bultmann, and Sasse. But where



Althaus erred in a disproportionate and xenophobic focus on the German *Volk*, he did so against his better judgment.<sup>10</sup>

## TWO | THE ALTHAUSIAN *SCHÖPFUNGSORDNUNGSLEHRE* AND ITS CRITICS

We must begin with a question: How Lutheran is the Althausian theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ and the theology of the *Volk* within which it is embedded?

Althaus was perhaps the preeminent Luther scholar of his generation, and his theology was shaped by Luther in virtually every respect. He wrote two authoritative works on Luther: *The Theology of Martin Luther* (English translation 1966) and *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (English translation 1972), both of which appeared after the Second World War. In neither book does Althaus reference Luther’s *Judenschriften*.<sup>11</sup> Of course, that is not surprising; the postwar years saw an abrupt cessation of scholarly research on Luther’s anti-Jewish texts. Quite apart from the obvious professional hazard of handling these themes during denazification, the ‘evidence of horrors’ had made any constructive engagement with the writings untenable.<sup>12</sup>

All the same, Althaus’ relationship to the Jews, like Luther’s, is complicated. It is puzzling, then, that even during the 1920s and 1930s, during which time Luther’s anti-Jewish writings were circulated widely, Althaus constructed his complex theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ without any reference to the

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<sup>10</sup> This line of argumentation has been used to explain Martin Luther’s antisemitism. See Eric Gritsch, *Martin Luther’s Anti-Semitism: Against His Better Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012). By using this phrase, I do not mean to excuse Althaus’ xenophobic and anti-Jewish rhetoric. Rather, I am arguing that by making these comments, Althaus is overlooking and violating elements of his own theology.

<sup>11</sup> Kirsi Stjerna and Brooks Schramm have assembled Luther’s writings on the Jews, including exegetical works and homilies, in the useful compendium, *Martin Luther, The Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader*, ed. Kirsi Stjerna and Brooks Schramm (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> See Reiner Anselm, “‘Luther und die Juden’ in der systematischen und ethischen Debatte nach 1945,” in *Martin Luthers ‘Judenschriften’: Die Rezeption im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Harry Oelke et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 235–36. On the mixed reception of the *Judenschriften* from Lutheran orthodoxy through the twentieth century, see also Thomas Kaufmann, *Luther’s Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism*, trans. Lesley Sharpe and Jeremy Noakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4–8 and 125–52.

*Judenschriften*. This absence is so conspicuous that Christopher Probst has concluded that “[d]espite the vast quantity of literature that Althaus penned, he was curiously silent on “Luther and the Jews.” Thus, there is really no way to analyze directly “Althaus on ‘Luther and the Jews.’”<sup>13</sup> The theology of the *Volk* out of which Althaus formed his views on the ‘Jewish Question’ is not strictly Lutheran, if by this we mean that he relied directly on Luther’s anti-Jewish writings. Beyond that, moreover, Althaus was following an innovative trend within the Lutheran tradition when he designated the *Volk* as an order of creation, taking the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* in a direction that Luther himself did not envision, as James Stayer has noted.<sup>14</sup>

Speaking more broadly, the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*, in the words of Walther Künneth, is an ‘insecure and easily misunderstood’ development in Lutheran theology, in part because it is really the product of nineteenth-century neo-Lutheranism [*Neuluthertum*] with tenuous authority in Luther himself. This explains, to Künneth’s mind, the plurality of interpretations of the doctrine in contemporary Lutheran theology.<sup>15</sup> Luther had indeed spoken of three estates which structure human communities—*status economicus* (marriage), *status politicus* (state), and *status ecclesiasticus* (church)—but he never systematised them into an explicit doctrine of orders of creation.<sup>16</sup> That task fell to the theologians of the Erlangen

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<sup>13</sup> Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> See Stayer, *Martin Luther*, 88. Hinlicky adds that Althaus’ interpretation of the doctrine is a “‘progressive’ adaptation to supposed cutting-edge advances in evolutionary and anthropological science” (*Before Auschwitz*, 22).

<sup>15</sup> See Walter Künneth, *Politik zwischen Dämon und Gott: Eine christliche Ethik des Politischen* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1954), 118–20.

<sup>16</sup> See Martin Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528), in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press; St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–), 37:364–65. American Edition of Luther’s works hereafter abbreviated as LW. Luther sometimes varies the sequence in which these estates are treated, but in every case he limits the divine orders to these three, which are subordinate to the controlling order of Christian love. The estates of marriage and civil government exist primarily to preserve common life from falling into disarray. See also *Commentary on Psalm 111* (1530), in LW 13:368–69; *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), in LW 41:177;

School: Johann Hofmann and especially Gottlieb Harless, in whose work the language of *Schöpfungsordnungen* probably first appears.<sup>17</sup> Luther, of course, could scarcely have anticipated the modern concept of ethnicity as a structural element of human community, and so he would have seen no need to designate *Volk* as an additional ordinance of creation. After all, he once mused, ‘we have more than enough to do in living aright and resisting the devil in these three [estates].’<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, later Lutheran theologians, namely Harless and Hofmann, expanded Luther’s estate of marriage to include the family and, by extrapolation, the *Volk*. Thus, by the time Althaus addressed himself to questions of national belonging and German identity in the 1920s, Erlangen theologians had been theologising the *Volk* for half a century.<sup>19</sup>

Going further still, Althaus and Elert made claims for the sanctity of the *Volk* that Harless and Hofmann did not. We know that Althaus’ innovations on this point made some observers uncomfortable in his own context. One pastor Karl-Heinz Becker of Ezelheim wrote to Althaus in 1938 to question whether Althaus could find any authority for his concept of the *Volk*’s ‘we-consciousness’ [*Wir-Bewußtsein*] in the theology of the reformers.<sup>20</sup> On that score, Althaus himself seems to have known that the *Volk* did not figure prominently in Luther’s own work. In *The Ethics of*

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and *Table Talk* (1542–43), in LW 54:445–46. In Article XVI of the *Augsburg Confession*, Melancthon appeals to a broadly Lutheran view of *Obrigkeit*, by which ‘good order in the world [is] instituted by God.’ In this context, ‘orderly government’ covers both temporal authority and the estate of marriage. See *The Augsburg Confession—German Text* (1530), in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles Arand et al. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 48.

<sup>17</sup> See Gottlieb Christoph von Harless, *Christliche Ethik*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1875), 491f. While Harless does use the vocabulary of *Schöpfungsordnung*, he often prefers the dynamism of *Schöpferordnungen* (‘orders of the Creator’) or *Berufsordnungen* (‘orders of vocation’). See also Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*, in LW 41:177.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed study of the nineteenth-century origins of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* in the Erlangen School, see Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 9–54.

<sup>20</sup> Karl-Heinz Becker to Paul Althaus, 4 May 1938, NA 10.

*Martin Luther* he omits any comment on the *Volk* as an ordinance of creation, perhaps a tacit acknowledgment that Luther does not have much to say on the matter.<sup>21</sup> Althaus' Erlangen colleague Hermann Sasse put it somewhat more bluntly. Whoever searches the Lutheran Confessions for an explicit theology of *Volkstum*, says Sasse, will be disappointed: there simply is none.<sup>22</sup> It is a point that Althaus is more-or-less willing to concede, but not without an objection. It is true, Althaus admits, that classical Lutheran social ethics does not appreciate the state's relationship to the *Volk*. Still, he argues, Luther had a robust consciousness of his own Germanness, even if he did not thematise it theologically. Most significantly, historical circumstances have changed for the German nation, and while it was perfectly appropriate to have a theology of state without a theology of *Volk* in Luther's time, such a formulation is no longer sufficient now.<sup>23</sup>

At any rate, Probst is surely correct that a *direct* analysis of Althaus' relationship to Luther's theology of the Jews is difficult. Yet Althaus did rely at least partially on Luther's writings to form his theology of the *Volk*, although not on the materials one might have expected. Implicitly in the Weimar years and then explicitly in the late 1930s, Althaus constructed a robust theology of the *Volk*—within which he builds his thinking on the 'Jewish Question'—on the basis of a single sentence from Luther's *Small Catechism* of 1529: 'I believe that God created me together with all that exists.'<sup>24</sup> In a pair of 1937 essays, Althaus takes the

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<sup>21</sup> See Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1972).

<sup>22</sup> See Hermann Sasse, *Das Volk nach der Lehre der evangelischen Kirche* (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1934), 5–6.

<sup>23</sup> See Althaus, *Obrigkeit und Führertum*, 15–18.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism for Ordinary Pastors and Preachers* (1529), in *The Book of Concord*, 354.

elemental character of the *Volk*, a concept he extrapolates explicitly from the *Small Catechism*, as his starting point:

... the *Volk* is a creation of God. From where do I know that? 'I believe that God created me.' The belief that God created me includes my *Volk* along with it. For whatever I am and have, God has given me out of the wellspring of my *Volk*: the inheritance of blood, of body [*Leiblichkeit*], of soul, of spirit. God has determined my life—both outwardly and down to my innermost—through the life of my *Volk*, through its blood, through its spiritual type, which shapes me above all in my language and through its history.<sup>25</sup>

This appeal to Luther's *Catechism* indicates that even if Althaus understood himself to be innovating, he thought he was innovating within the confines of Lutheran teaching on creation.

The temptation to disassociate Althaus' personal views on *Volkstum* and on the 'Jewish Question' from his theological system, and therefore from Luther's, is understandable. One such attempt has been made, as we have seen, by Paul Knitter, who argues that the xenophobic dimension of Althaus' nationalist outlook is rooted not in his theology, but in his ideology.<sup>26</sup> In the same vein, Hans Tiefel has concluded that the version of Lutheran social ethics espoused by Althaus (and by others such as Friedrich Gogarten, Werner Elert, and Emanuel Hirsch) can scarcely be called Christian at all. Because Althaus tethered the enterprise of ethics to his *Uroffenbarungslehre*, a theology open to extra-biblical or pre-biblical revelation,

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<sup>25</sup> Althaus, *Völker vor und nach Christus*, 5. Compare his comments in 'Kirche, Volk und Staat' of 1937:

'I believe that God created me.' In this faith we also recognise our *Volk* as God's creation. For God creates us within and out of the life of our *Volk*. He has ordained that I receive my life from Him in the determination of the life of my *Volk*, that is, that the life of my *Volk*, its inheritance of blood and inheritance of spirit [*sein Blut- und Geisterbe*] determines my life both inwardly and outwardly (19).

Althaus puts forth a similar argument in *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 11–12. He had begun to develop these themes as early as 1919. See parallel language in 'Das Erlebnis der Kirche,' 841–42.

<sup>26</sup> See Knitter, 'Die Uroffenbarungslehre,' 147–48. Brunner had made a similar comment in the early 1930s, arguing that Althaus' political and *völkisch* theologies derive not from Luther, but from German Romanticism and Idealism. See Emil Brunner, *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen: Entwurf einer protestantisch-theologischen Ethik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1932), 650–51.

there is no distinctly Christian content to prevent capitulation to a racialised zeitgeist: 'Once the law is thus cut loose from Christian and biblical considerations, nothing stands in the way of defining God's law along nationalistic and racial lines.'<sup>27</sup>

One can perhaps vindicate 'authentic Lutheranism' by discrediting Althaus in this way. But in my view the better course of action is to confront Althaus' theology of the orders of creation as a genuine—if genuinely problematic—expression of Lutheran theology. Paul Hinlicky has isolated the salient point: in the end it will not do to make the 'defensive argument that real Christianity, or the real Luther, or real Lutherans are not really to blame.'<sup>28</sup> Following Hinlicky, I suggest that Althaus was a real Lutheran who formulated a real Lutheran doctrine with real flaws. Whether the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* can be salvaged is a question to which we shall return in due course.

In any event, during his denazification trial Althaus faced the challenge of accounting for some of his more radical statements that appeared to glorify the *Volk*. The Althaus interpreter is now faced with the same challenge, which is compounded by the dialectical nature of his theological system. The fact is that there are dimensions of his theology of the *Volk* that are undeniably xenophobic. These elements came to their most acute and problematic expression in his theology of the 'Jewish Question,' culminating in the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph*. At the same time, there is evidence that Althaus understood himself to be resisting the pseudo-religion of *völkisch* nationalism and ethnic exceptionalism. Helmut Thielicke summarises the complex trajectory of Althaus' thought:

That which could initially mislead a superficial reader of the writings of Paul Althaus to discover National Socialist elements in those writings is, without

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<sup>27</sup> Tiefel, 'The German Lutheran Church,' 332.

<sup>28</sup> Hinlicky, *Before Auschwitz*, 67.

doubt, an extant national pathos. However, whoever has his whole theological literary development in view, as I do, perceives a clear and unambiguous line from the relatively unbroken theological—yet still not reflective—nationalism of the young Althaus . . . to an increasingly reformed and strictly defined concept of the national. One could compile countless citations from his lectures, seminars, and books out of which it emerges clearly how Althaus combatted precisely this ‘nationalism’—and indeed all other ‘-isms’—and how he had spoken of the demonic possibilities of this and other forms of absolutising.<sup>29</sup>

Thielicke overstates the progressive elements of Althaus’ thought and he is in any case too charitable; I am not convinced that there is a ‘clear and unambiguous’ development from naïve complicity to principled resistance. But he is right that there is substantial textual evidence that Althaus came to recognise the orders’ vulnerability to demonic distortion. Althaus himself made the same point during his denazification proceedings in 1947 by reading his own writings against themselves.<sup>30</sup> A sophisticated reading of Althaus’ total theology of the *Volk*—including his theology of the ‘Jewish Question’—such as that which I have offered reveals both xenophobic and trans-ethnic visions for the organisation of society.

As the *Kirchenkampf* raged on in the 1930s, the Lutheran doctrine of the orders of creation in general, and Althaus’ trenchant version in particular, received criticism both from within Lutheran circles and from without. Swedish Lutherans Gustaf Aulén (1879–1977) and Anders Nygren (1890–1978) questioned whether German Lutherans had sufficiently reckoned with the reality of sin in their formulation of the doctrine. A pair of Swiss Reformed theologians, Karl Barth (1886–1968) and Emil Brunner (1889–1966), echoed these concerns. As I will demonstrate below, in each case Althaus not only anticipated these critiques, but had

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<sup>29</sup> Thielicke, ‘Äusserung,’ 2–3.

<sup>30</sup> See the 1947 Deposition of Paul Althaus, where Althaus lists a series of proof-texts from his own writings to vindicate his theology of *Volk* and *Volkstum* (2–3).

also made provisions to prevent the misuse of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* to which these critics point. More than that, though, there are resources in Althaus' own formulation of the theology of the orders of creation to mitigate against the idolisation of the *Volk*—even if, as was often the case, he did not always heed his own warnings. In this respect, I am following the analysis of Althaus' Erlangen colleague, Walter Künneth. As we have seen, in Künneth's estimation the doctrine of the orders of creation is an unstable evolution within Lutheran thought, and in his own work he prefers the dynamic language of *Erhaltungsordnungen* to the static *Schöpfungsordnungen*.<sup>31</sup> If confined to the classical model of the doctrine, however, he regards the Althausian formulation as more satisfactory than some contemporary alternatives precisely because it offers a 'safeguard' [*Sicherung*] against an ever-threatening tendency to autonomise the orders. That is, through the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* Althaus manages to affirm 'the activity of creation without losing sight of the existence of the Fall at the same time.'<sup>32</sup>

Althaus can indeed use the doctrine in such a way as to generate a trans-ethnic social vision. Yet as I have mentioned, the ethical promise of Althaus' permutation of the doctrine certainly has its limits; even though he can to some extent imagine a supra-*völkisch* society, he cannot imagine human communities, ecclesial or civil, without segregation. There are, however, resources to make this correction within the Lutheran tradition itself. As the next chapter will show, there are articulations of a Lutheran theology of creation that avoid the danger of essentialising race. In sum, then, the problem lies not with Lutheran social ethics *per*

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<sup>31</sup> See Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 180–84 and 209–11.

<sup>32</sup> Künneth prefers Althaus' account to that of Emil Brunner, which he deems theologically untenable, and those of Friedrich Gogarten and Wilhelm Stapel, whose fatal identification of *Volksnomos* and *Gottesgesetz* has brought the doctrine into 'disrepute.' See *Politik zwischen Dämon und Gott*, 118–20.



se, but with Althaus' *self-defeating tendencies*, whereby he overrides the *Sicherungen* (to use Künneth's language) designed to prevent the radicalisation of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*.

#### A | ALTHAUSIAN ANSWERS TO LUNDENSAN QUESTIONS

The Swedish Lutherans of the Lundensian School had been keeping a keen eye on the politics of the German churches as the *Kirchenkampf* unfolded in the early 1930s. With the benefit of an outside perspective, the theologians in Lund recognised the demonic nature of National Socialism more quickly and more clearly than their fellow Lutherans to the south. Indeed, as denazification played out in Erlangen some twelve years later, Hermann Sasse lamented that his colleagues had not heeded the warnings of the Lundensians.<sup>33</sup> One such warning came from Gustaf Aulén, who wondered whether German Lutherans had not underestimated the power of sin to disfigure the orders. He writes that the problem results from a flawed understanding of the relationship between sin and creation:

In certain theological circles the idea of 'orders of creation' has caused considerable mischief, not least when the state has been identified as one of these 'orders.' It has even been suggested that these 'orders' are sacrosanct, even when their appearance and activity militate against the most elementary demands of the divine will of love. It seems to have been forgotten both that their function is to serve this will of love and that they exist under conditions imposed by sin.<sup>34</sup>

As Aulén sees it, an underdeveloped theology of sin had blunted the doctrine's critical prowess and blurred the distinction between God's original creation and its fallen state. This distortion of the doctrine, moreover, had also lost sight of the regulating force of the love-command, a flaw that other critics would also notice.

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<sup>33</sup> See Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler*, 347.

<sup>34</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *The Faith of the Christian Church*, trans. Eric Wahlstrom and Everett Arden (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1954), 191–92. This edition is the translation of the fourth Swedish edition which appeared in 1943. The first Swedish edition appeared in 1923.

Tragically, this means that the orders have become enslaved to the very ‘diabolical forces’ they are designed to restrain.<sup>35</sup> Yet, as I will demonstrate below, Althaus *had* reckoned with the gravity of sin in his theology of the orders and was well aware of their entanglement with evil.

Aulén’s critique was intensified by his colleague Anders Nygren, whose penetrating assessment of the *Kirchenkampf* has proven remarkably accurate in retrospect. In his collection of 1934 essays, translated as *The Church Controversy in Germany*, Nygren voices the theological concerns of ‘the foreign nations [whose eyes] are fixed more and more on the scandalous proceedings in the German Church.’<sup>36</sup> In particular, he expresses surprise and dismay at the *Erlangen Opinion* and its support for ‘a somewhat modified Aryan Paragraph’; he had expected Althaus and Elert to reject the clause as forcefully as Bultmann and the Marburg faculty had done.<sup>37</sup> He considers the theology of the *Volk* exhibited in the *Erlangen Opinion*, however, as only symptomatic of a much more serious problem: the reality that the German churches have exchanged Christianity for an idolatrous religion of race and egoism. Though he does not name Althaus, Nygren targets theologies that glorify the *Volk* as the root of the problem:

What then is [the church struggle] about? The answer is simple: *it is about Christianity itself, its being or not being*. What has happened in Germany in these days is nothing more and nothing less than that *a new religion has appeared on the stage* by the side of and in opposition to Christianity—a religion founded on blood and soil, or race-idealism. . . . [Germans] have adopted the Nation, and they have adopted it as something holy—nay, as the Holy of Holies. The holiness of people and race has become the absolute value. This race passion has gone all over Germany as a revival, and the peculiar thing is that it has in an equal degree fettered Christians and non-

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Anders Nygren, *The Church Controversy in Germany: The Position of the Evangelical Church in the Third Empire*, trans. G.C. Richards (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1934), 72.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 42.

Christians.<sup>38</sup>

Nygren does not foresee a solution to this Germanist idolatry by which ‘the deification of their own race is taking the place of religion.’<sup>39</sup> Yet it is precisely here that Althaus’ case proves so challenging: his theology has the resources to satisfy the concerns of both Aulén and Nygren. With Aulén, Althaus stresses the fallenness of the orders; with Nygren, he seeks to combat the blasphemous religion of secular nationalism. Though his works were not a direct response to the issues raised by Aulén or Nygren, Althaus does offer answers to these Lundensian questions.

Although he anchored his ethical system in the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*, Althaus always had a profound sense of the sinfulness of the orders in their historical manifestations. In the second edition of his *Theologie der Ordnungen*, he emphasises that the orders are *essentially* fallen; that is, their very nature shares in the brokenness of postlapsarian creation: ‘[The orders] have fallen into sin not only insofar as the wickedness of individuals and of collective humanity distort and abuse them in history, but also insofar as the orders have necessarily been intertwined with [*verflochten*] sin in our world that has fallen under sin and the curse of death.’<sup>40</sup> While Creation and Fall can be distinguished theoretically, the distinction becomes virtually impossible to maintain in practice. This *Verflochtenheit* means that all human action—in every sphere—is morally ambiguous: ‘[O]ne cannot serve within the orders of history without simultaneously participating in the building of the kingdom of sin.’<sup>41</sup> For this reason he warns against the ‘absolutising’ of the orders.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 86–87. Emphasis in the original. Nygren’s conclusion that a false religion had infiltrated and even replaced Christianity in Germany is consistent with the ethos of the Lundensian School, who ‘strongly maintained that they did not do normative or constructive theology. They only provided a rigorously objective description of the distinctively and authentically Christian.’ See Arne Rasmusson, ‘A Century of Swedish Theology,’ in *Lutheran Quarterly* 21:2 (2007), 135.

<sup>39</sup> Nygren, *The Church Controversy in Germany*, 86–87.

<sup>40</sup> Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 48–49.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 61.

For Althaus the orders themselves are the mechanism designed to prevent their abuse; the various ordinances check and govern one another. Distortion ensues only when one of the orders—including the *Volk*—is elevated over the others.<sup>42</sup>

This also means that Althaus is aware that the love of *Volk* is especially subject to idolatrous disfiguration: ‘The *völkisch* desire is the will to live [but] it is not exempt from the hex which hangs over all natural desires—the danger of a lapse into the demonic. The noble glow of love of *Volk* can become a wild, impure fire.’<sup>43</sup> Like Nygren, Althaus saw the blasphemous exaltation of the *Volk* in both the German Christians and the German Faith Movement. And, also like Nygren, he judged that *völkisch* fanaticism represented a rival religion competing with Christianity for the devotion of the German soul:

We recognise the demonic totality of the *Volk* [*dämonische Totalität des Volkes*] where one, in the name of *Volkstum* and without respect for and obedience to the German soul’s history with Christ, demands a *völkisch* religion that arises out of the living primal-source [*Urgrund*] of *Volkstum* itself.<sup>44</sup>

Althaus perceived precisely this ‘demonic totality of the *Volk*’ within the German Christian movement, through whose rhetoric ‘[t]he natural love for oneself, the love of one’s mother as well as the love of *Volk* and fatherland have all deteriorated into the demonic—into arrogance, vanity, bondage, intoxication—each one a distortion of genuine devotion.’<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See *ibid.*, 21–23. Dating back to the Weimar years, Althaus had always emphasised that the orders are penultimate realities. See ‘Gott und Volk,’ 39–40. He also showed an awareness of the human propensity to disfigure the orders of creation, which exist for humanity’s benefit, into a ‘tyrannical idol’ or a ‘prison of scruples,’ just as he judged the Jews had done with the Sabbath commandment. In his own context, Althaus warns of the idolisation of work, the state, and the economy. See ‘Ordnungen’ (13 October 1935), in *Der Herr der Kirche*, 238–46.

<sup>43</sup> Althaus, ‘Kirche und Volkstum,’ 120. See also Althaus, ‘Gott und Volk,’ 45–46 and Althaus, ‘Das Gebot der Stunde,’ 233–34.

<sup>44</sup> Althaus, ‘Totaler Staat?’, 134–35. Cf. ‘Kirche und Staat,’ 749.

<sup>45</sup> Althaus, ‘Politisches Christentum,’ 17.

Althaus also feared that the spread of *völkisch* fervor would undermine the church's proclamation and witness. Though he supported the impulse behind the *völkisch* movement—i.e., the rediscovery and renewal of German *Volkstum*—he foresaw the increasing danger of radicalism even before the rise of National Socialism.<sup>46</sup> He articulates the dilemma as he unpacks the distinction between *Volkskirchentum* and *völkisches Kirchentum*<sup>47</sup> in 1935:

The *Volkskirche* would become a *völkisch* church [*völkisches Kirchentum*] in the moment it no longer witnesses to the one God and Lord who calls all peoples into his Kingdom, but witnesses instead to a national god [*Nationalgott*]; no longer to biblical salvation-history but to national history as salvation- and redemption-history; no longer to the Holy One, who is the Lord and measure of all ethnic ideals, desires, and ordinances, but to a pitiful little godling [*Göttlichen*], which would be nothing more than the epitome or the guarantor of ethnic ideals, desires, and ordinances.<sup>48</sup>

Althaus knew that humanity, perhaps especially when pursuing noble ideals, would always court idolatry—even within the church. As a renewal of patriotic sentiment flooded across Germany, Althaus called the church to purify secular nationalism and to name the god of the German soul as the God of Christian scripture. Anything else would mean that Germans are worshiping a ‘national god.’ Ironically, Althaus even designated the Jews a critical resource for the purification of secular and ethnic nationalisms, as we have seen. By the very fact of their stubborn existence, Jews testify that no *Volk* can replace the God who stands above all orders with a pathetic ‘godling’ of ethnic exceptionalism.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See especially Althaus' 1932 essay 'Gott und Volk.'

<sup>47</sup> The terms are difficult to render into English, but *Volkskirchentum* communicates an expression of Christianity that conforms to the specific needs and spiritual essence of the *Volk*, while *völkisches Kirchentum* is pejorative, referring to an ecclesiology that is totally consumed and compromised by jingoistic ethnic nationalism. '*Kirchentum*' is the word Althaus uses to combine the church's nature as office with the church's nature as community. See 'Kirche und Staat,' 747.

<sup>48</sup> Althaus, 'Kirche und Volk,' 358. See also 'Theologisches Gutachten über die Thüringer Richtung der Deutschen Christen,' 675.

<sup>49</sup> See 79–86 above.

B | 'THE MOST EVIL OF ALL THEOLOGICAL DOCTRINES'? DIALOGUE WITH  
BARTH AND BRUNNER

If Althaus' Lutheran colleagues to the north expressed concern over the destructive capabilities of the orders, it should not be surprising that the doctrine came under attack from the south as well. Theologians within the Swiss Reformed tradition, too, criticised the way in which Althaus formulated the concept, with Karl Barth ultimately condemning the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* as a completely catastrophic—and totally hopeless—basis for Christian ethics. Emil Brunner also worried about a latent Romanticism lurking behind Althaus' theology of the *Volk*, but nevertheless proved more optimistic about rehabilitating the theology of the orders—albeit with a more sober focus on their function as remedies for sin and provisional safeguards against chaos. Here again, though, Althaus shows (theoretical) awareness of the sinfulness and penultimate nature of the orders and answers Brunner with a robust account of the orders as a manifestation of God's continuing work of creation.

It was unlikely that Althaus was ever going to find an ally in Karl Barth. From the beginning, Althaus and Barth shared a troubled relationship in which collegial civility could sometimes devolve into scornful polemics. Nevertheless, the two maintained a significant correspondence until their falling-out in the early National Socialist years.<sup>50</sup> The root of the disagreement—as had been the case in Barth's *Abschied* from Brunner and Gogarten, which resulted in the dissolution of their collaborative enterprise, *Zwischen den Zeiten*, at the end of 1933—was of

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<sup>50</sup> Althaus and Barth, nearly exact contemporaries, came of age in the same generation. They exchanged letters on a wide range of theological topics for over a decade until about 1934, when the relationship broke down totally. Their correspondence resumed, at Althaus' initiation, in the early 1950s. See *Briefwechsel*, 12–117.

course the question of natural theology, with which these theologians (he names Bultmann as well) had made an ‘evil pact.’<sup>51</sup>

For Barth, though, it was Althaus’ unique formulation of natural theology in the doctrine of *Uroffenbarung* that rendered Lutheran ethics especially irreparable, opening a Pandora’s box of theological problems. If it takes *Uroffenbarung* as its starting point, argues Barth, Lutheran political ethics will *inevitably* fail:

I confess that [Althaus’ book *Religiöser Sozialismus*] has greatly strengthened my deep mistrust of the sinister connection between Lutheran inwardness and Lutheran worldliness. Whoever can bring the will of God into such dangerous proximity to the little bit of experience of the heart and conscience of so-called Christians and the little bit of ‘common life of the congregation’ will also of necessity bring it into the quite fatal proximity to history, nature, and fate. The psychological immanence of God of necessity brings the cosmic in its train.<sup>52</sup>

Barth’s anxiety, it seems to me, is justifiable to an extent: it is true that for Althaus God’s self-disclosure need not be (exclusively) christologically grounded. However, it is not quite fair to categorise *Uroffenbarung* as a bald ‘natural theology’; it would be closer the mark to say, as Yoder has done, that Althaus perceives God’s action in historical life, not in nature *per se*.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, if Barth supposes that Althaus considers *Uroffenbarung* sufficient for salvation apart from God’s revelation in Christ, he is mistaken on this point.<sup>54</sup> Because, however, Althaus conceives of God’s revelation before and apart from Christ as the necessary ‘pre-history’ for the Incarnation, he found it incomprehensible that one could do Christian theology or

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<sup>51</sup> Barth to Althaus, 2 January 1933, in *Briefwechsel*, 96–97.

<sup>52</sup> Barth, ‘Basic Problems,’ 56. In a January 2, 1933 letter to Althaus, Barth characterised the *Uroffenbarungslehre* as an ‘irredeemable bolted lock that bars both the first paragraphs of your *Grundriß* [The second edition of Althaus’ *Grundriß der Dogmatik*, which appeared in 1932] and everything that follows.’ See *Briefwechsel*, 96–97.

<sup>53</sup> Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 78.

<sup>54</sup> The relationship between *Uroffenbarung* and *Christusoffenbarung* in Althaus’ theology is, as Choi has argued, ‘dialectical.’ For Althaus, *Uroffenbarung* does not mean that each religion makes equally valid truth-claims; rather, all human religion will be judged by the final criterion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That said, according to Althaus, *Uroffenbarung* is a necessary *precondition* of God’s self-disclosure in Christ, though it is not by itself sufficient for saving knowledge of God. See Choi, *Das Konzept der Ur-Offenbarung*, 117–18.

ethics *without* a doctrine of general revelation.<sup>55</sup> These incongruent theologies of revelation came to expression in their irreconcilable political attitudes as reflected the *Barmen Declaration* (which had condemned Althaus' brand of general revelation as no less than a false teaching) and the *Ansbach Memorandum*, respectively.

In the end, the two theologians did not even share the vocabulary to resolve the impasse over the doctrine of the orders of creation—something Barth seems to have recognised quite early on.<sup>56</sup> The events of the spring of 1934 proved the last straw for a relationship that had been near its breaking point for some time. Althaus reached out to Barth again two decades later—partially as a gesture of reconciliation, and partially to complain about how Barth had lumped Althaus' theology of *Volkstum* in with cruder forms of *völkisch* theology in the *Church Dogmatics*.<sup>57</sup> Barth's response cuts to the heart of the dispute:

My silence toward you persists because of the singular wideness [*Welträumigkeit*] of your theological dialectic, which has always perplexed me. . . . I worried about your christology and your '*Ur-Offenbarung*.' You say so much which, to my mind, cancels itself out and which, in any case, was never perceptible to me as a unified whole. One day you must explain to me in a face-to-face conversation—without fuss or quibble, without any both/and—what the unified whole that you want to express actually is. . . . Now, as for what you are asking about in particular: From the very beginning (indeed I must now touch on a very delicate point), I feared that the tree of

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<sup>55</sup> Althaus suggests that God's revelation in natural law, for instance, is a necessary 'pre-history' [*Vorgeschichte*] for God's revelation in Christ; the church's very *kerygma*, therefore, is a historically conditioned development that is *only* comprehensible with reference to God's prior revelation apart from and before Christ. That is to say, '[i]t did not fall from heaven' (see Althaus, "'Durch das Gesetz,'" 14). These conclusions, of course, brought Althaus into stark disagreement with Barth's 'exclusively christological dogmatics,' which Althaus believed violated the New Testament and the common Protestant tradition. Reflecting on the prevailing theological attitudes in Germany during his student years and early career, he remarked elsewhere:

Even in those days, I found the narrowness of the predominant doctrine of revelation unbearable. It seemed to me unbiblical and cramped. I never could understand how we as theologians and churchmen could surrender the whole world of nature and of history to skepticism and secularism, and parrot what atheistic philosophy had done to strip our lives of God.

Quoted in Wenzel Lohff, 'Paul Althaus,' in *Theologians of Our Time: Adam, Althaus, Balthasar, Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Congar, Guardini, Niebuhr, Rahner, Schlier, Tillich*, ed. Leonard Reinisch (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 54.

<sup>56</sup> 'That we mean something so entirely different when we talk about church, revelation, Christ is a calamity that cannot be lamented enough' (Barth to Althaus, 2 January 1933, *Briefwechsel*, 97).

<sup>57</sup> See Althaus to Barth, 25 October 1953, in *Briefwechsel*, 102–03.



your theology could also bear such fruit one day [here Barth refers to theologies which cohered with National Socialist ideology]—and then when I read your signature (was it in 1934 or later?) under the ‘*Ansbacher Ratschlag*,’ I felt myself entirely justified—nuances or not—in seeing you together with all the other *Volk*-theologians in the same boat.<sup>58</sup>

In retrospect, we can see that to some extent Barth’s premonition about the failure of Lutheran ethics and his fears about the sinister dimensions of Althaus’ theology would come to pass. Althaus would not speak a decisive ‘No’ to God’s revelation in history: a decision (or, more accurately perhaps, an indecision) with fateful consequences, as Jack Forstman has noted.<sup>59</sup> But whether this signifies the total vindication of Barthian theology over and against Lutheran confessionalism, as Forstman and others have intimated, is a separate question. It is also worth asking whether Barth caricatured Althaus, making him into a straw man of a confused Lutheran political ethic.<sup>60</sup> Most critical for my purposes, however, is that straight through to the end of his career, Barth considered the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* totally unsalvageable—‘the most evil of all theological doctrines,’ as he put it back in 1922.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Barth to Althaus, 1 November 1953, in *Briefwechsel*, 103–04. Emil Brunner, too, felt that Barth’s judgment was defensible at the time. He wrote the following to Althaus in the fall of 1934:

When [Barth] speaks so contemptuously about you, I of course disapprove of it completely. But I do understand it at least a little bit because of your church-political attitudes. What with that evil proclamation with Hirsch [Brunner here refers to ‘Erklärung über “Evangelische Kirche und Völkerverständigung”’ of June 1931] together with your wavering attitude toward the German Christians.

See Brunner to Althaus, 21 November 1934, in *Briefwechsel*, 146–47

<sup>59</sup> For the debate between Althaus and Barth, see Forstman, *Christian Faith*, 121–32. Arthur Cochrane has likewise cited Althaus a negative foil in his sympathetic account of Barthian theology and the *Barmen Declaration*. Cochrane further intimates that Althaus and the Erlangen Lutherans were primarily concerned with preserving their own confessional identity ‘at a time when the “house was on fire,” when the very existence of the evangelical Church was at stake’ (*The Church’s Confession*, 181–96).

<sup>60</sup> Jasper argues that the ‘two-kingdom’ doctrine, as it exists in the imagination of critics, was Barth’s ‘polemical invention’ based on a ‘truncated’ reading of Althaus’ theology. Jasper claims Barth seized on the political theology of Althaus and others who failed to oppose National Socialism as proof of the inadequacy of Lutheran doctrine. So while Jasper agrees that Luther’s political views were problematic, he suggests that they were so because Althaus did not use the doctrine of the two kingdoms properly. See ‘Die Zwei-Reiche-Lehre,’ 41–46.

<sup>61</sup> Barth, ‘Basic Problems,’ 48.

Barth's fellow Swiss Emil Brunner was more optimistic about the ethical promise of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*, and, perhaps not by coincidence, was also much more congenial toward Althaus. Indeed, Brunner and Althaus had much in common, not the least of which was the withering wrath of Barth—something they each experienced across their careers. The two shared a close friendship over the course of many decades, though their relationship strained under the weight of Althaus' political associations, namely with Emanuel Hirsch, during the early 1930s.<sup>62</sup> They also debated the ethical import of the doctrine of the orders of creation, both in their personal correspondence and in their respective publications: Brunner's *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen* appeared in 1932, and the second edition of Althaus' *Theologie der Ordnungen* followed in 1934.

Though he is a Reformed theologian, Brunner's handling of the doctrine has significant implications for Lutheran theology in general, and for how the Lutheran theologian might approach the 'Jewish Question' in particular. In *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen* Brunner attacks Althaus on two fronts: 1) by exposing a 'Romantic' philosophy of history that warps the theology of creation and yields a flippant doctrine of sin, and 2) by charging that Althaus' ethics lacks an eschatological vision. The combined consequence of these two flaws, argues Brunner, is a failure to distinguish between the present, fallen state of creation and the completion of creation that God has inaugurated in the work of Jesus Christ and intends to fulfill in the eschaton. However, as I suggest below, Althaus' theology has the resources to satisfy Brunner's concerns; whether he attends sufficiently to these resources in practice is far less certain.

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<sup>62</sup> Brunner made reconciliation contingent upon Althaus' disassociation from 'that wicked Hirsch.' See Brunner to Althaus, 21 November 1934, in *Briefwechsel*, 136–47.

In the first place, Brunner considers Althaus' thinking too 'Romantic,' especially as it came to expression in his theologies of the state and the *Volk*. Yet on both topics the two theologians are relatively close because of their common reliance on 'our shared Luther' (as Brunner put it) in the framing of their respective ethical enterprises.<sup>63</sup> For instance, there is not much to choose between Brunner's account of the *Volk* and that of Althaus. Both list common living space, common blood, common family stock, common biological makeup, a shared history and destiny, and above all a shared language as the ingredients of *Volkstum*.<sup>64</sup> Despite this ostensible similarity, though, Brunner sees a critical difference of nuance: his own intensified focus on the inherent sinfulness of both the state and the *Volk* as postlapsarian constructs rooted not in creation itself, but in the perversion of creation. The state, for example, is for Brunner an ordinance that exists *solely* on account of human sinfulness:

The compulsory character of the state—that is, of that which we call the state—is not to be understood as an expression of the will of the Creator. Civil community is on that account only community in a broken, improper sense, and this ordinance of community is not an ordinance of creation, but is actually an ordinance determined by the fact of sin . . . the state is the product of collective sin.<sup>65</sup>

For this reason he prefers the terms *Sündenordnungen* ('ordinances of sin') or *Zuchtordnungen* ('ordinances of discipline') to *Schöpfungsordnungen*. This shift, as Lutheran theologian Paul Hinlicky has suggested, is actually a better formulation of

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<sup>63</sup> After having read *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen*, Althaus remarked: 'In both the individual aspects of the overall system, as well as in the greater aspects, you and I agree marvelously, even if never discussed exactly these questions.' Althaus to Brunner, 18 May 1932, in *Briefwechsel*, 141–42. Emphasis in the original. After having read Althaus' *Theologie der Ordnungen*, Brunner reciprocated: 'It is the case for me, as apparently it is for you also: I feel myself nearer to you theologically from year to year. The reason: our shared Luther.' Brunner to Althaus, 29 March 1934, in *Briefwechsel*, 143–44.

<sup>64</sup> See Brunner, *Das Gebot*, 441–42, Althaus, 'Kirche und Volkstum,' 113–14, and Althaus, *Völker vor und nach Christus*, 4–5.

<sup>65</sup> Brunner, *Das Gebot*, 431–32.

original intent of the doctrine and is more faithful to the chronology of the biblical narrative.<sup>66</sup>

In the same way, Brunner also considers the *Volk* a corrective measure whose very existence testifies to the fracturing of humanity at the Fall. The *Volk*, though it is in a qualified sense ordained by God, is an amalgamation of the bounty of creation and the barbarousness of postlapsarian existence:

*Völker* are not some platonic ideals that at some point took on earthly form, but are instead extremely ‘random’ constructs [*überaus ‘zufällige’ Gebilde*] into which both the creative richness of individualisation and the effects of the most savage and powerful forces have been woven together into indivisible unity. The same applies for a *Volk* as does for an individual person: ‘Behold, I have been born into sin,’ and ‘You, O God, have formed me in my mother’s womb.’ There is truly no ground for the romantic glorification of one’s own ethnic individuality.<sup>67</sup>

With his poignant characterisation of the *Volk* as an ‘extremely “random” construct,’ Brunner understands himself to be correcting an error of ‘modern Lutheranism.’ He cites in particular the *völkisch* theologies of Althaus, Brundstäd, and Hirsch, which locate the origins and destiny of the *Volk* in prelapsarian providence. Specifically, he wonders how the ‘transience of all nations that have existed to the present does not expose the relativity of this concept.’<sup>68</sup> *Relativity* is the key word here, as Brunner has his finger on the crux of the issue: Althaus fails to acknowledge that the state and *Volk* are only *relative* measures. Consequently, he makes the fallen creation ethically normative. In other words, Althaus does not err by the mere recognition of the historical fact of ethnic pluralism, but he does err by refusing to relativise the *Volk*, a

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<sup>66</sup> ‘Political sovereignty was not one of the original Lutheran orders of *creation*, for its institution arises *after the fall* of the first couple. It exists temporarily, then, as a *Notordnung*, an “emergency order”’ (Hinlicky, *Before Auschwitz*, 186. Emphasis in the original). Brunner later remarks that, in terms of political theology, ‘[h]ere we side with Luther against the Romantic historicism [*Geschichtsromantik*] of Althaus’ (*Das Gebot*, 651, note 10).

<sup>67</sup> Brunner, *Das Gebot*, 442.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 650–51, note 9.

construct which itself participates in the problem it is designed to correct, in light of the Kingdom of God—a critique to which we shall return momentarily.

Aside from one objection—‘I believe my doctrine of the state is not as Romantic as you suppose’<sup>69</sup>—Althaus did not think Brunner had misrepresented his theology. Yet in the second edition of *Theologie der Ordnungen*, he is at pains to distinguish his positions from Brunner’s, despite their considerable agreement, and to explain his rationale. Given the subtlety of their diverging views, as well as the implications for the viability of this important Lutheran doctrine, a careful study is warranted.

To begin with, Althaus stresses the fallenness of the orders to such an extent that it is ‘theologically impossible to distinguish between the orders as *Schöpfungs-* and *Erhaltungsordnungen*, or indeed, as Emil Brunner wants to do, to distinguish between orders of creation and orders of sin [*Sündenordnungen*].’ Instead, the theologian must see the orders as both an expression of God’s creative will and as structures entangled ‘with sin and death.’<sup>70</sup> But here again, Brunner had worried that the problem with Althaus’ *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* was precisely this kind of conflation of creation and sin wherein the two are considered as essentially the same thing. This means that, in turn, Althaus cannot, or rather does not, differentiate between creation and fallen creation—something Barth had discerned years earlier.<sup>71</sup>

Still, it is difficult to deny that Althaus is keenly aware of the great destructive potential of the disfiguration of the orders in their historical

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<sup>69</sup> Althaus to Brunner, 18 May 1932, in *Briefwechsel*, 141–42. Even though Althaus’ view of the state, even the totalitarian state, was perhaps Romantic—Lowell Green has characterised it charitably as ‘benign’ (*The Erlangen School*, 275)—he always knew that the Third Reich was not the Kingdom of God, and that no earthly government ever could be. See Althaus, ‘Drittes Reich und Reich Gottes’ 31.

<sup>70</sup> Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 15–16.

<sup>71</sup> See Brunner, *Das Gebot*, 651. Brunner attributes this tendency in Althaus’ theology to the influence of Hirsch. Cf. Barth, ‘Basic Problems,’ 54.

manifestations, as we have seen. He makes the point decisively in *Theologie der Ordnungen*: ‘Order and sin are inseparably entwined with one another. But we must still go one step further. The distortion of the orders through human sin is to a large extent rooted in the orders themselves: we violate them precisely by participating in them.’<sup>72</sup> To anticipate Brunner’s second criticism: here we see that Althaus is entirely cognisant that the orders of creation have the capability to degenerate into anti-creation and he therefore does not simply equate the present state of the world with God’s original (or ultimate) design.

In my view, the disagreement between Althaus and Brunner is therefore not, at base, about sin and its effects. Rather, the deeper issue at play is a fundamental difference of understanding regarding the nature and purpose of creation, especially as seen in light of the eschatological redemption of the created order. Althaus always argued that the orders perform more than a merely negative, preservative function. ‘The state,’ he insists, ‘is more than just a *remedium peccati*. But here, of course, you see my Romanticism!’<sup>73</sup> But the two could not find common ground on this point because, for Althaus, ordinances like state and *Volk* do not arise ‘exclusively in reference to the reality of sin.’<sup>74</sup> On the contrary, he wants to understand the orders as movements within the dynamism of God’s *creatio continua*:

If one renounces this concept [i.e. *Schöpfungsordnungen*], then one also renounces Luther’s notion of creation as the continuous and present action of God which is occurring today. . . . Why then may we not speak of ‘*Schöpfungsordnungen*,’ namely of the orders and means of God’s present creative action? ‘*Erhaltungsordnungen*’—this concept virtually denies God’s ongoing creative action. God does not merely maintain the world, but he creates continually.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 50–51.

<sup>73</sup> Althaus to Brunner, 19 May 1934, in *Briefwechsel*, 145.

<sup>74</sup> Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 15–16.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Hence, continuing his dispute with Brunner in 1935, Althaus will come to speak of the state's 'paternal office' through which God continues to create the world out of fatherly love.<sup>76</sup>

Brunner's more searching critique emerges here: Althaus' view signals a failure to think *eschatologically* about the function of the orders. This criticism, which I think Althaus' theology can address with varying degrees of success, is nevertheless helpful in producing a healthier ethic with greater promise to mitigate against xenophobic constellations of the doctrine. Brunner's controlling assumption is that there is a distinction to be made between the 'created order' [*die Schöpfungsordnung*] and the 'redeemed order' [*die Erlösungsordnung*].<sup>77</sup> This assumption has dramatic ethical implications as the ordinances of the fallen creation are regulated and relativised by the ordinances that anticipate God's eschatological completion of creation. Thus the real question that divides Althaus and Brunner is the extent to which the fallen orders are ethically normative. In practice, the orders of creation—sinful though they are—have much greater ethical purchase for Althaus than for Brunner.<sup>78</sup>

This is the case because, for Brunner, the present world can only be the *starting point* for ethical reflection:

Acceptance of the order that is given, because it is given by God, is the first word of Christian ethics—but it is never the last. What God wills as the Creator is always the first thing; but it is—irrespective of our sin—not the last thing. For he wants creation to go beyond itself [*er will Schöpfung über sich selbst hinausführen*] toward the completion [*Vollendung*] of all things. He preserves the world not merely for the sake of preserving it, but in order to

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<sup>76</sup> See Althaus, 'Kirche und Staat,' 749–50.

<sup>77</sup> See Brunner, *Das Gebot*, 192–202.

<sup>78</sup> Knitter notes that, despite ostensible similarities between Althaus and Brunner on this point, Althaus asks the theology of general revelation to do more work than does Brunner: 'Theoretically, Althaus' "Uroffenbarung" is very similar to Brunner's "Schöpfungsoffenbarung"; but phenomenologically and practically, Althaus attributes much more efficacy and independence to his general revelation than Brunner does' (*Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions*, 53).

bring it to completion. . . . The given [*das Gegebene*] is not what God created, but is actually that which God created fractured by sin. Therefore God requires of us not only the first thing—acceptance of the given—but he requires a second thing: obedience to his will as we recognise it in the will of the perfecter the redeemer.<sup>79</sup>

Thus ‘acceptance’ of the created order is only the first step of ethical action. More important, in Brunner’s estimation, is the ‘second thing’: resistance to the orders insofar as they represent not only the sinful distortion of God’s original intent for creation, but also a poor approximation of the redeemed order. This in turn means that the Christian both ‘accepts’ the given world for the sake of what it is (i.e., God’s good but broken creation) and at the same time ‘protests against’ the given world for the sake of what it will become.

The regulatory principle of this eschatologically-grounded ethic is the demand of the neighbour, which the church—as a community in which the work inaugurated by Jesus Christ has been partially realised—is both authorised and obligated to meet.<sup>80</sup> Hence for Brunner the Christian not only *can* oppose her own family, state, or *Volk*, but *must* do so when love of neighbour [*der Nächsten*—literally, ‘the one who is next to me’] requires it. For Althaus, by contrast, the claim of the love-command is surpassed by the autonomy of the *Volk* as it pursues its historical destiny. Walther Mann explains:

This quality of being an ‘end in itself’ [*Selbstzwecklichkeit*], this autonomy or this vocation does not always match up with the love-command [*Liebesgebot*]. Althaus therefore makes obedience to God—rather than love—the keyword of Christian ethics and in so doing goes a step beyond Luther.

The implications for the handling of the ‘Jewish Question’ are clear.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Brunner, *Das Gebot*, 198–99.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>81</sup> Mann, *Ordnungen der Allmacht*, 104. Mann suggests that Althaus’ (qualified) adoption of the Aryan Paragraph in the churches stems from his belief that the occupation of the church’s offices is to be determined above all by the *Beruf* of the *Volk*, usually as articulated by the state (107–08). Mildenerberger likewise judges that



What is striking about this impasse, however, is that Althaus' theology actually attends, to varying extents, to Brunner's concerns—often in very similar language. That is to say, Althaus too understands *in theory* that the orders of creation all stand under the eschatological judgment of the Kingdom of God. In *Theologie der Ordnungen*, for example, he emphasises that criticism of the orders is not only possible but indeed necessary when an ordinance, including the *Volk*, elevates itself above the other orders and, in the process, self-negates. In a schema that closely parallels Brunner's 'acceptance'/'protest' model, Althaus hints that eschatology must inform any ethic of the orders: 'I must struggle for the ordinance *as it should be*, but *I must remain in the ordinance as it is*—both belong together.'<sup>82</sup>

Perhaps under the influence of Brunner's criticism, Althaus would later emphasise the fundamental transience and finitude of *Volk*. More than that, however, he would draw the critical implication that, as a fallen creature, the *Volk* is an insufficient basis for a binding theological ethic:

My *Volk* is a creation, not itself God or the divine essence; it is not immortal, not itself the origin and standard of all norms and worth. The transcendent and eternal God, who alone possesses immortality, has decreed mortal life for my *Volk*, just as he has for the life of other peoples.<sup>83</sup>

There is evidence here, in other words, that Althaus could articulate the doctrine in such a way as to address Brunner's worry. In Althaus' thought system, as Dieter has observed, there are mechanisms which regulate the ordinances of creation in (at

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to replace love with any other criterion for action, even in the so-called secular sphere, is a fundamental misunderstanding of the doctrine of the two kingdoms. See *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, 222–24.

<sup>82</sup> Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 67. Emphasis mine.

<sup>83</sup> Althaus, 'Kirche, Volk und Staat,' 19–20. Cf. Althaus, 'Kirche und Volk,' 353. Kurz has suggested that particularly for the early Althaus, the *Volk* has some sort of eschatological purchase as an eternal reality: 'For Althaus the ordinance of creation "*Volk*" also had an existence in the Kingdom of God, that is, beyond the world bound by time: the individuality of the *Völker* must have its equivalent in eternity; a "trans-ethnic cosmopolitanism" is to be dismissed as a purely human concept' (*Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 432–33, 440). That is a plausible reading, but I think the evidence shows that Althaus came to stress the penultimate nature of the *Volk* clearly in his mature work.

least) three ways: temporally (as they are all subject to the coming Kingdom of God), in terms of content (as God can call each ordinance into question), and through their mutual balancing of one another.<sup>84</sup> Althaus knows that the orders are penultimate, broken, and liable to problematic imbalance.

Yet even after having read *Theologie der Ordnungen*, Brunner remained unconvinced. Moreover, he questioned whether Althaus' account is actually Lutheran at all:

The one thing that separates us is what I call the residual Romanticism in your concept of history, which, it seems to me, comes to expression in your political attitudes. . . . You introduce into your doctrine of the state an account which I never hear in Luther but which, on the contrary, is in full accord with what I have heard—and continue to hear—in the writings of the Idealists. For me—and excuse me for saying so—you are simply not sober enough theologically when it comes to this issue.<sup>85</sup>

However, as I have argued, the problem is not that Althaus is 'not sober enough theologically.' As Mann has shown, Althaus came to emphasise the inherent sinfulness of the orders more and more sharply over the early 1930s. Furthermore, his theology of the orders is 'eschatologically structured' insofar as he acknowledges a *theoretical* distinction between the present state of creation and its intended eschatological state.<sup>86</sup>

The larger issue, it seems to me, is that Althaus' theology has the resources to satisfy Brunner's critique but he does not utilise them in his *concrete* political and ecclesio-political decisions, such his recommendation to prohibit Jewish men from pastoral office in the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph*. Althaus' theoretical framework for resistance to the distortion of the orders too often failed to translate

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<sup>84</sup> See Dieter, 'Das Volk as Schöpfungsordnung,' 183.

<sup>85</sup> Brunner to Althaus, 29 March 1934, in *Briefwechsel*, 143–44.

<sup>86</sup> See Mann, *Ordnungen der Allmacht*, 45–48, 50–51.

into the concrete. Put another way, the xenophobic dimensions of his theology ultimately overrule the mechanisms designed to prevent this disfiguration of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*.

## CONCLUSION | AGAINST HIS BETTER JUDGMENT

There is a sense in which Althaus' critics know him better than he knows himself. From their vantage point outside of Althaus' thought-system, Aulén and Nygren could discern the looming threat of distortion that surrounds the doctrine of the orders of creation. Barth and Brunner were able to point to some of the internal inconsistencies that plague Althaus' theology with more specificity. In Brunner's judgment, when Althaus developed his hyper-nationalist concept of the *Volk*, he was doing so in violation not only of his own doctrinal tradition, but in violation of elements of his own theology:

Just as with its thinking about the state, modern Lutheranism is strongly influenced by romantic Idealism in its thinking about the *Volk*. This is evident, for example, in Althaus with his doctrine of ethnic-vocation [*Volksberuf*]. *While Althaus certainly knows otherwise*—that is, about what the Lutheran concept of vocation really means—he formulates the concept of ethnic-vocation in such a way that the purest representative of romantic individualism could not have expressed it any more pristinely.<sup>87</sup>

Brunner's most penetrating insight is a simple one, and it echoes what I have argued here: in order to frame the *Volk* as an ethically-normative entity, Althaus had to violate the principles not only of his Lutheran tradition, but of his own particular

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<sup>87</sup> Brunner, *Das Gebot*, 658, note 26. Emphasis mine. Of course, Althaus feels himself justified in mapping Luther's concept of *Beruf* onto the *Volk*. Mann has shown, however, that here Althaus is drawing not only on Luther, but also on Hegel, Fichte, Schleiermacher, as well as Harless and Hofmann. See Mann, *Ordnungen der Allmacht*, 102–03. As mentioned above, Mann considers Althaus' development of the *Volksberuf* regulated not by the law of love but only by its own autonomy to be 'a step beyond Luther' (104). Jasper likewise suggests that in his radical theologies of *Volk* and war, Althaus is 'fully conscious' that he is 'transgressing the Lutheran tradition' by drawing on extra-Lutheran influences such as Ranke, Herder, the Romantics, the Idealists, and the Pietists. Simply put, in Jasper's view Althaus knows he is constructing a theology that is not strictly Lutheran. See 'Die Zwei-Reiche-Lehre,' 43–44. The claim, I think, is defensible, but as I have argued above (see 212–14), Althaus is at least trying to root his account of the *Volk* in a Lutheran view of creation, though he is certainly innovating.

theological system. Put another way, where Althaus prioritises the autonomy of the *Volk* within his theology of the orders of creation, he is acting against his better judgment.

## CHAPTER IX | THE MAKINGS OF A LUTHERAN CORRECTIVE: BONHOEFFER, BULTMANN, AND SASSE

The church is not a community of people who are all the same but precisely one of people foreign to one another who are called by God's word. The people of God is an order over and above all other orders.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer,  
'Theses on "The Aryan Paragraph in the Church"' (1933)

### INTRODUCTION | DISEASED IMAGINATION AND ETHNIC TAXONOMY

If there is a common thread that unites Aulén, Nygren, Barth, and Brunner, it is that each recognised that the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* is susceptible to parochiality. Althaus' formulation of the doctrine in particular is continually at risk of actualising in a deeply problematic socio-theological blueprint for the organisation of human communities, but especially for the church community. His theology of the *Volk* is fatally inward-looking, another symptom of what Brunner considers to be a serious deficiency in modern Lutheranism: 'The aversion of modern Lutheran theologians toward everything that points toward the supra-national [*das Übernationale*] stems not from their Lutheranness, but from their Romanticism.' Specifically, Brunner suspects that Althaus (as well as Brundstäd and Hirsch) have not reckoned sufficiently with 'the end of all things' when God will establish an 'all-encompassing unified-creation' that will render all national and ethnic distinctions secondary.<sup>1</sup>

We turn our focus now to Brunner's question: can Althaus envision 'the supra-national,' whether civil or ecclesial? The answer, as I have argued throughout, is ambivalent: yes and no. Althaus can, and sometimes does, use the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* in such a way as to provide glimpses of a semi-inclusive

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<sup>1</sup> Brunner, *Das Gebot*, 650–51, note 9.

co-existence between ethnic groups. But that is as far as his doctrine of creation can take us. This flawed theology of creation is, in my view, further compounded by an inadequate ecclesiology. This weak ecclesiology manifests in the inability (or unwillingness) to subordinate the claims of the *Volk* to the claims of the church, which exists as a supra-ethnic community elected before the foundation of the world, as the Apostle puts it in Ephesians 1:4, and therefore ontologically prior to the *Volk*. Indeed, even when Althaus attempts to conceive of human communities as trans-ethnic bodies, *segregation*—both outside the church and within it—proves to be the limit of his imagination. The impulse toward racial and ethnic taxonomising is in part a reflex that Althaus inherited from a ‘diseased Christian imagination,’ to use Willie James Jennings’ memorable language. This reflex distorts the doctrine of creation and is usually bound to a profoundly supersessionist theological agenda. This diseased imagination also produces a link between supersessionism and dangerous nationalisms by extracting the concept of divine election from the concrete particularity of Jewish existence; once this is done, election can then be mapped onto any national history.<sup>2</sup> This supersessionist-segregationist method accounts for much of what Althaus is doing in his theology of the ‘Jewish Question.’

And yet in Althaus’ writings there are at the same time traces of an alternative theological logic that holds promise to imagine both ecclesial and civil communities as supra-ethnic in character. Paradoxically, Althaus flashes perhaps his most robust multi-national vision in the midst of one of his most xenophobic tracts:

There is but one God, and he is above *Volk* and state. He is concerned also with other *Völker*. He has placed us next to one another and wants us to live with one another. Thus we cannot, in our vain presumption, consider other *Völker* as nothing and deny their right to life. Patriotism which has been

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<sup>2</sup> See Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), especially 209–20 and 250–88.

sanctified by Christ is to be sharply distinguished from wild, blind fervour, which acknowledges no Lord, and therefore acknowledges no limits to its claim or to its power. True patriotism rejoices in the other *Völker* in their particular type and respects the unique design of God which has come to expression in each one.<sup>3</sup>

On the ecclesial front, there is evidence that he understands that the boundaries of the church are not coterminous with ‘human demarcations,’ including ethnic boundaries.<sup>4</sup> On this basis, Althaus can offer an interpretation of the church as a mystery that transcends and relativises the ethnic antagonism of the *Konfliktgesetz*, which dominates national relations in the secular sphere:

In the church, the false absoluteness [*die falschen Unbedingtheit*] of our historical agendas must die off because God’s true absoluteness reminds us of the provisionality [*die Bedingtheit*] of our historical points of view and objectives. In the church, therefore, there grows a community which transcends all of the antagonism between our goals and paths, transcends parties, and transcends all conflicts between peoples [*Völkerkämpfe*]. . . . These antagonisms and conflicts do not simply cease. But they cease to be the ultimate concern [*das Letzte*] and thereby lose their evil, destructive, and acrimonious power.<sup>5</sup>

By the early 1950s, Althaus would come to charge the church with a ‘special task’: to provide a ‘home’ [*Heimat*] for ‘coloured people’ and ‘those of mixed race’ [*die Rassenmischlinge*] who do not have their own sense of ethnic belonging.<sup>6</sup> Of course, he is still trafficking in the grammar of a racialised taxonomy, but he nonetheless shows an (underdeveloped) awareness that the church must militate against the ethnic segregation that defines secular existence.

Although he had the resources to do so, however, Althaus did not bring this trans-ethnic theology of the church (limited and fragmentary as it is) to bear on the concrete question of the place of Jewish persons in the German churches during the

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<sup>3</sup> Althaus, ‘Das Vaterland,’ 245.

<sup>4</sup> Althaus, ‘Luthers Wort an die Gegenwart,’ 322–23.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 326–27.

<sup>6</sup> See Althaus, *Grundriß der Ethik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 128–29.

*Kirchenkampf*. In sum, his *theoretical* theology of the church did not translate into the *practice* of communing with Christians of Jewish descent. Instead, Althaus chose to privilege the ‘historical agenda’ of the German destiny over the obligation to his Jewish neighbours. The reason for this, as I have argued throughout the thesis, is that his theology of the *Volk*—and thus his theology of the ‘Jewish Question’—is dialectical, oscillating back and forth between inclusion and exclusion in a tension that he could never fully resolve.

This tension is perhaps most clearly typified in Althaus’ essay ‘Totaler Staat?’ from 1934. Here Althaus is advocating a theology of the *Volk* that does exhibit an inclusive dimension. Paradoxically, he imagines the renewal of German *Volkstum* will at the same time provide an environment in which diverse *Völker* can flourish:

The German *Volk* will, for the sake of its own historical destiny and for the peace of Europe, always think beyond the idea of the *Reich* and will envision its ideal fulfillment as a trans-ethnic [*übevölkischen*] political ordinance, a protectorate under which many people can live according to their type. . . . The *Reich* restrains itself from guarding only the independent existence of its own *Volk* and instead preserves diversity. Fascism cannot conceive of this concept of the state. But in the soil of National Socialism it can grow.<sup>7</sup>

His astonishing misjudgment of the nature of National Socialism notwithstanding, Althaus offers a societal vision that is trans-ethnic, but only in a qualified sense. We can see his dialectical theology at work again here. The model is inclusive: the state must safeguard diversity, thereby making space for the other. But this inclusivity takes the form of quarantine: diversity always manifests as segregation—many peoples living next to each other ‘according to their type.’ It is precisely this theological construct that came to concrete expression in the *Erlangen Opinion on*

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<sup>7</sup> Althaus, ‘Totaler Staat?’, 132–33.



*the Aryan Paragraph* and which, in the end, Althaus cannot escape. This paradoxical compound of inclusion and exclusion is the limit of Althaus' own formulation of the doctrine of the orders of creation, and at this point we may also be approaching the limit of his theological imagination generally. In this regard, Barth may have been right in his judgment that Althausian theology has a tendency to cancel itself out.<sup>8</sup>

Lutheran social ethics has staggered under the combined weight of the Barthian critique and the events of the first half of the twentieth century. In light of these factors, there have been serious questions about whether the doctrine of the orders of creation can be salvaged and put to productive use.<sup>9</sup> While I appreciate the gravity of these concerns, I am not convinced they amount to a fatal flaw; even while theologians like Althaus failed to appropriate the doctrine correctly, there is promise for repair within the Lutheran tradition itself. As I have argued here, the chief difficulty with the Althausian articulation of the concept is not just the *content* of the doctrine (though of course there are deeply problematic elements here, as we have seen), but even more so the way in which he positions the ordinance of the *Volk* with respect to the church. That is to say, the doctrine need not be jettisoned, as Barth suggests, but rather put into its proper place. By relying on the work of Althaus' Lutheran contemporaries—Bonhoeffer, Bultmann, and Sasse—we discover adjustments to the theology of the orders of creation that avoid the pitfalls of xenophobic ethnic segregationism by subordinating the *Volk* to the church.<sup>10</sup> In the

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<sup>8</sup> See Barth to Althaus, 1 November 1953, in *Briefwechsel*, 103–04.

<sup>9</sup> Carl Braaten observes that some Lutheran ethicists overcompensated for the doctrine's perceived failure by discarding it and resorting to situation ethics. See 'God the Creator Orders Public Life,' in *No Other Gospel!: Christianity Among the World's Religions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 123–24.

<sup>10</sup> I have made an abbreviated iteration of the following argument in 'A Reappraisal of the Orders of Creation,' *Lutheran Quarterly* 31:3 (in press, forthcoming 2017). There, I offer a dialogue with Bonhoeffer and Sasse as one avenue toward the renewal of the doctrine of the orders of creation. However, this is only one proposal among many possibilities. For instance, Nathan Howard Yoder has recently made a compelling case that Lutheran ethicists should be looking to the Trinitarian theology of Walther Künneth for the recovery of the orders of creation tradition. See *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, chapter 4.

brief accounts to follow, we consult three expressions of Lutheran ecclesiology that prioritise the trans-ethnic quality of the church over and against the inward-looking heresy of what Bonhoeffer calls ‘pseudo-Lutheranism.’

### **ONE | THE VOLK IN THE FACE OF THE ONE REALITY: DIETRICH BONHOEFFER (1906–1945)**

In the late 1920s, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, nearly twenty years Althaus’ junior, joined Althaus in an effort to revive Lutheran ecclesiology by reclaiming a concept that had become marginalised in Lutheran orthodoxy: church as *communio*.<sup>11</sup> Their interest in ecclesiology eventually found opportunity for concrete expression as the debate turned toward how the German churches should handle the ‘Jewish Question’ in the early 1930s. Both theologians issued formal declarations about the adoption of the Aryan Paragraph in the DEK within months of each other. Although Althaus and Bonhoeffer shared some common theological assumptions about the meaning of Jews and Judaism, they soon parted ways on an ecclesial ethic—a divide that begins to emerge first in Bonhoeffer’s essay ‘The Church and the Jewish Question’ of April 1933.

On the face of it, Bonhoeffer approaches the ‘Jewish Question’ on similar terms to Althaus: he considers the issue unresolvable specifically because of the unique—that is to say, cursed—nature of contemporary Jewish existence. ‘The church of Christ,’ he writes, ‘has never lost sight of the thought that the “chosen people,” which hung the Redeemer of the world on the cross, must endure the curse

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<sup>11</sup> Althaus published *Communio Sanctorum: Die Gemeinde im lutherischen Kirchengedanken* in 1929; Bonhoeffer’s *Sanctorum Communio: Eine dogmatische Untersuchung zur Soziologie der Kirche* followed in 1930. For an appraisal of these respective projects within the context of the broader development of Lutheran ecclesiology, see Rolf Schäfer, ‘Communion in Lutheran Ecclesiology,’ *Lutheran World Federation Documentation* 42 (1997), 133–62. While Schäfer considers both efforts to retrieve *communio* as an ecclesial model to be abortive, he sees greater promise for an outward looking theology of the church in Bonhoeffer’s brand of ‘non-confessional’ Lutheranism.

of its action in long-drawn-out suffering.’<sup>12</sup> Ironically, the very grammar of Bonhoeffer’s discourse on the subject is anti-Judaic, even when he is arguing for the inclusion of Jewish Christians in the churches of the DEK. Churches that exclude Christians of Jewish descent from their communion, he suggests, are submitting themselves to the yoke of the Law; they are acting like legalists—that is, they are acting like Jews.<sup>13</sup> Though his views would famously change over the following decade, Bonhoeffer initially authorises the state to take legislative measures against Jews.<sup>14</sup> Like Althaus, Bonhoeffer cannot escape an anti-Judaic imaginative framework, and he likewise engages the ‘Jewish Question’ on prejudicial terms. Nevertheless, as is reflected in his ecclesiology, Bonhoeffer is able to overcome the *völkisch* impulse which is evident in his early writings.<sup>15</sup>

The theology of Judaism Bonhoeffer puts forth in ‘The Church and the Jewish Question,’ then, is not without its problems. However, already in this essay we can discern the beginnings of ecclesial ethic that Bonhoeffer would come to state with increasing clarity over the course of 1933. Once fully developed, this ethic provides Bonhoeffer with the resources to advocate for the full inclusion, without qualification, of Jewish persons in the German churches. The challenges posed by

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<sup>12</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ‘The Church and the Jewish Question’ (15 April 1933), in *DBWE* 12. The initial drafts of the *Bethel Confession* of August 1933, in whose composition Bonhoeffer was instrumental, characterise Jewish existence as ‘indelible,’ meaning that Jews, marked by God, are therefore able neither to assimilate into their surrounding societies nor establish their own nation. See the *Bethel Confession*, in *DBWE* 12:418.

<sup>13</sup> Bonhoeffer, ‘The Church and the Jewish Question,’ 369–70. We see a similar line of argumentation in Bonhoeffer’s July 1933 essay, ‘The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis,’ in *DBWE* 12:372. Like other Protestant theologians of his era (including Althaus), Bonhoeffer employs the charge of ‘Jewishness’ or ‘Phariseism’ as a rhetorical device to undermine the positions of other Christians with whom he disagrees. See Stephen Haynes, ‘Who Needs Enemies? Jews and Judaism in Anti-Nazi Religious Discourse,’ *Church History* 71:2 (2002), especially 355–59 and 365–67.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Without doubt one of the historical problems that must be dealt with by our state is the Jewish question [*sic*], and without doubt the state is entitled to strike new paths in doing so’ (Bonhoeffer, ‘The Church and the Jewish Question,’ 363). At this stage, Bonhoeffer considers it beyond the church’s jurisdiction to confront the state about the morality of its measures; that work, he suggests, should be left to humanitarian organisations and individual Christians.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, the series of lectures he delivered to a German-speaking congregation in Barcelona in 1929 in *DBWE* 10:360–78.

the state's actions against Jews, he argues, 'can only be answered on the basis of a right concept of the church.'<sup>16</sup> Despite his ambivalence about the ultimate theological significance of the Jewish people, Bonhoeffer is unequivocal that, in its posture toward the 'Jewish Question,' the very existence of the church is at stake. '[T]he obligatory exclusion of baptised Jews from our Christian congregations' signifies a *status confessionis*—a matter of the church's very essence and integrity.<sup>17</sup>

Bonhoeffer fleshes out this concept more fully in his July 1933 memorandum, 'The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis,' wherein he warns that if the German churches adopt the Aryan Paragraph, the very substance of the church would be in peril.<sup>18</sup>

With his emphasis on the 'Jewish-Christian Question' as a *status confessionis*, Bonhoeffer has been building momentum toward a decisive rejection of any attempt to organise the church according to the dictates of National Socialist legislation. This line of ecclesial reasoning reaches its climax in his 'Theses on "The Aryan Paragraph in the Church"' in September 1933, where Bonhoeffer roots his objection to the Aryan Paragraph in a critical theological move. Here he makes an adjustment to the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* by subordinating every earthly order to the church:

In the church, a Jew is still a Jew, a Gentile a Gentile, a man a man, a capitalist a capitalist, etc., etc. But God calls and gathers them all together into one people, the people of God, the church, and they belong to it in the same way, one with another. The church is not a community of people who are all the same but precisely one of people foreign to one another who are called by God's word. *The people of God is an order over and above all other orders.* . . . Race and blood are one order among those who enter the

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<sup>16</sup> Bonhoeffer, 'The Church and the Jewish Question,' 362.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 366, 368.

<sup>18</sup> Bonhoeffer, 'The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis,' 372. Bonhoeffer considers it fundamental that the church's autonomy be respected both in how its members are treated and in how fitness for pastoral office is determined.

church, but it must never become a criterion for belonging to the church; the only criterion is the Word of God and faith.<sup>19</sup>

This approach represents an alternative to Althaus' theological vision. Bonhoeffer on the one hand acknowledges the particularity of ethnic identities—he does not pretend that ethnic diversity simply does not, or should not, exist within the church—but insists on the other hand that every penultimate distinction (*Volk*, race, gender, or political affiliation) is relativised within the collective identity of the one people of God. By this logic, the Aryan Paragraph is a 'false doctrine' that destroys the church; simply put, it is a heresy.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, Bonhoeffer also knows that many 'Germans' will be uncomfortable sharing the ecclesial space with 'Jews,' given the troubled history (real or imagined) between the two peoples. It is a concern that Bonhoeffer understands, but rather than conceding to the 'weaker members of the congregation' who are scandalised by Jews in their midst, he actually recommends conflict within the church. These weaker brothers and sisters, he argues, should be forced to tolerate a Jewish presence precisely so that they can learn what the church really is: 'Here, where the Jewish Christian whom I dislike is sitting next to me among the faithful, this is precisely where the church is.'<sup>21</sup> It is on this exact point that the ecclesial theologies of Bonhoeffer and Althaus part ways: for Bonhoeffer, the church will self-negate if it sacrifices its Jewish members; for Althaus, the church will fail its mission if it does not.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Theses on "The Aryan Paragraph in the Church,"' in *DBWE* 12:426–27. Emphasis mine. Bonhoeffer is close to the spirit of Luther here. In his *Lectures of Genesis* (1535–45), Luther comments that the church takes priority over all other orders, for it is established prior to the ordinances of household and state as a sign that 'man was created for another purpose than the rest of living beings.' See *LW* 1:103–04.

<sup>20</sup> Bonhoeffer, 'Theses on "The Aryan Paragraph in the Church,"' 428.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> See David Robinson and Ryan Tafilowski, 'Conflict and concession: nationality in the pastorate for Althaus and Bonhoeffer,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 70:2 (2017): 1–20.

These incompatible interpretations of the applicability of the Aryan Paragraph in the church are the outcome of the radically divergent ways in which Althaus and Bonhoeffer interpret the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* as an element of Protestant dogmatics. In distinction not only from Althaus, but also from Barth and Brunner, Bonhoeffer rejects the concept of ‘orders of creation’ and makes exclusive use of ‘ordinances of preservation’ instead.<sup>23</sup> Because the effects of sin to are so extensive that no earthly ordinance remains wholly intact, says Bonhoeffer, the remaining orders exist merely to curb the chaos of postlapsarian creation. As stated in Bonhoeffer’s drafts of the *Bethel Confession*, the mandates of marriage, family, *Volk*, and economy are not *autonomous* orders of the original creation and are ‘therefore of no value in themselves, but only in relation to the end which God will bring humankind, to the new creation in Christ. . . . They are valid orders of God but have no ultimate validity.’<sup>24</sup>

These themes come through most clearly in *Ethik*, where Bonhoeffer judges that the misapplication of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*, which mistakes penultimate stations of *Volk* and *Rasse* for ultimate categories, grows out of a deeper problem with Lutheran dogmatics: ‘two-realm thinking [*das Denken in zwei Räumen*].’<sup>25</sup> The critical error in this ‘pseudo-Lutheran’ ethical schematic is that it seals off the ‘secular’ sphere of creation from the ‘sacred’ sphere of God’s dominion. This dichotomous thinking manifests in theologies in which ‘the autonomy [*Eigengesetzlichkeit*] of the orders of this world is proclaimed against the law of

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<sup>23</sup> Barth of course rejects ‘orders’ language altogether. Brunner makes a distinction between ‘orders of creation,’ which are founded before the fall (such as marriage) and ‘ordinances of sin,’ which have their purpose solely in the restraint of sin (such as the state). Bonhoeffer does not think it is possible to separate sin from the ordinances, and thus rejects Brunner’s assertion that some ordinances are ‘ordinances of creation.’ Interestingly, Althaus criticises Brunner on identical grounds. See Jordan Ballor, ‘Christ in Creation: Bonhoeffer’s Orders of Preservation and Natural Theology,’ *The Journal of Religion* 86:1 (2006), especially 5–10.

<sup>24</sup> *Bethel Confession*, 387–89.

<sup>25</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1949), 61–69.

Christ.’<sup>26</sup> And while Bonhoeffer does not name his opponent, I have shown that this is precisely what has occurred not only in Althaus’ theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ generally, but also in the ‘two-realm ecclesiology’ [*Zwei-Sphären-Ekklesiologie*] of the *Erlangen Opinion* more specifically.<sup>27</sup> There, Althaus and Elert maintained segregation according to *Volk* even within the church, which is an accommodation to the ‘orders of this world,’ over and against the work of Christ, who in his own flesh has ‘broken down the dividing wall’ (Ephesians 2:14).

Althaus’ gravest mistake, following Bonhoeffer’s logic, is a failure to subject the *Volk* to the one reality of Christ:

There are not two realities, but *only one reality*, and that is the reality of God [*Gotteswirklichkeit*] that has become manifest in Christ in the reality of the world. In Christ we participate simultaneously in the reality of God and in the reality of the world. The reality of Christ contains the reality of the world within itself. The world has no reality of its own, independent of God’s revelation in Christ.<sup>28</sup>

With his appeal to the singular *Gotteswirklichkeit*, which claims the realities of the world within itself, Bonhoeffer undermines any attempt to root Christian ethics in the autonomy of the orders of creation. But, again, it is important to recognise that for Bonhoeffer penultimate things—labour, marriage, government, and most importantly for my purposes, *Volk*—do have interim value, but they are to be distinguished from the ultimate (i.e., the final coming of God) both *temporally* and *qualitatively*.<sup>29</sup> He therefore interprets the penultimate through the tripartite formula of incarnation—

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>27</sup> The term is Berndt Hamm’s. See ‘Werner Elert als Kriegstheologe,’ 225, note 60. Hamm sees in the *Erlangen Opinion* the influence of Elert’s faulty understanding of *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre* wherein the realm of Gospel is sealed off completely from the realm of Law. Tragically, says Hamm, Elert has imported his ‘extremely sharp’ distinction between Law and Gospel into his ecclesiology in his recommendations regarding Jewish pastors in the DEK. Though Hamm traces this element of the *Erlangen Opinion* to Elert, the document’s formulations are also consistent with, and representative of, Althaus’ theology of the orders of creation, as I have argued throughout.

<sup>28</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, 62. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Moberly emphasises the temporal and qualitative distinction between the penultimate and the ultimate in ‘Bonhoeffer’s Everyday Ethics for the Life of the Church’ (paper presented at Reading Bonhoeffer for the Life of the Church, St. John’s College, University of Durham, UK, September 20–22, 2016).

crucifixion–resurrection.<sup>30</sup> The incarnation shows that God affirms the created order; the crucifixion evidences God’s radical judgment over and rejection of the fallen created order; the resurrection signals God’s intention to remake the created order. As subject to God’s affirmation, rejection, and restoration of creation in Christ, the ordinances of this world are neither totally ‘destroyed’ nor totally ‘sanctioned’ but are instead chastened and brought into submission to the reign of God in Christ.<sup>31</sup>

In this respect, Bonhoeffer maintains a proper ‘eschatological distance’ from the penultimate world of fallen creation.<sup>32</sup> As structures of a crucified social order that has not yet been resurrected, ethnic identities and national allegiances are therefore relativised eschatologically. To put it another way, as Bonhoeffer does in the christology lectures he delivered in Berlin over the summer semester of 1933, the continuity between God’s original word of creation and the present state of creation has been ‘lost.’ In light of this disruption, things are not so simple. ‘*Volk* is no longer *Volk*’ in the sense that God intended.<sup>33</sup> So, while the orders of this age have their penultimate functions of restraining evil and preserving the world from chaos, they are also fundamentally questionable. In Bonhoefferian terms, the judgment of God in Christ exposes the universal provisionality of all human attempts to organise society, eliminating any basis for ethnic hierarchies and chauvinistic nationalisms. One of several problems with Althaus’ ethic of the orders, on the other hand, is this ‘loss of distance’ between the ultimate and the penultimate.<sup>34</sup> As a result of this ruinous failure of perspective, Althaus holds his Germanness much too tightly. The

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<sup>30</sup> See ‘Das Vorletzte,’ in Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, 79–85.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>32</sup> The term is Mildenberger’s, who argues that this ‘eschatological distance’ from the present order is a critical corrective needed in some forms of Lutheran theology. See *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, 127.

<sup>33</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Wer ist und wer war Jesus Christus? Seine Geschichte und sein Geheimnis*, Studentenbuch 4 (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1962), 41–42.

<sup>34</sup> Dieter, ‘Das Volk als Schöpfungsordnung,’ 185–86.



*Schöpfungsordnungslehre* turns toxic when it is asked to bear the weight of the ultimate. This is work, as Wolfhart Pannenberg has argued, that the doctrine is simply unable to do.<sup>35</sup>

Hence Bonhoeffer offers vital resources for the renewal of the orders of creation tradition and for a partial repair of Althaus' xenophobic framing of the doctrine. As Bonhoeffer well knew, Lutheran social ethics rests on a complex of paradoxes—*Deus absconditus et Deus revelatus*, law and gospel, the two kingdoms, *simul iustus et peccator*, the ultimate and the penultimate—which must be held in delicate balance or else lapse into static dichotomies. This dichotomous distortion, in the words of Carl Braaten, is a 'Lutheran heresy.'<sup>36</sup> Had Althaus overcome his stringent 'two realm thinking' by subjecting the claims of the *Volk* to the 'one reality of God' made manifest in Christ, he might have avoided the Lutheran heresy of dichotomy and formulated a socio-ecclesial theology in which genuine communion with Christians of Jewish descent is possible.

## **TWO | BOUND BY BAPTISM: RUDOLF BULTMANN (1884–1976)**

Althaus and Bonhoeffer were not the only Lutheran theologians to find themselves at the center of Aryan Paragraph controversy. Famed New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann also contributed to the debate in several key essays in 1933. Like Bonhoeffer, Bultmann makes critical adjustments to the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* to form an ethics more dynamic than Althaus' static system and, consequently, better able to handle the moral challenge posed by the

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<sup>35</sup> Pannenberg singles out Althaus' concept of the 'imperative of loyalty to the *Volk*' (*Grundriß der Ethik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 124–27) as an especially problematic example of demanding ultimate allegiances from penultimate categories: 'The mere existence of a people is no basis at all for the content that the preservation of national distinctions is the will of God . . . The mere fact of an existing national unit cannot provide the basis of an "imperative of loyalty to the people."' See 'The Nation and Humanity,' in *Ethics*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1981), 146.

<sup>36</sup> See Braaten, 'God the Creator,' 120 and Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 151–52.

Aryan Paragraph. The reader will recall that Bultmann recruited Althaus to sign the September 1933 statement ‘Neues Testament und Rassenfrage,’ which was published concurrently with the *Marburg Opinion*. Althaus evidently never responded to Bultmann’s petition, and the *Erlangen Opinion* appeared in print just days later.<sup>37</sup> Bultmann’s letter of September 18, 1933 marks the last significant correspondence between the two for a number of years. They resumed their exchange in 1940, but the question of the *Volk* did not surface again.<sup>38</sup>

The fall of 1933 was the critical juncture: Althaus and Elert finished the *Erlangen Opinion* in September, and the *Marburg Opinion*, drafted primarily by Bultmann, was published in October. The stark difference between the two documents garnered interest abroad; Anders Nygren, for one, had hoped that the Erlangers would have followed Bultmann and his colleagues.<sup>39</sup> The theological imaginations animating the respective declarations, however, could not be reconciled. Like Bonhoeffer, the Marburg faculty saw the implementation of the Aryan Paragraph as ‘irreconcilable with the essence of the Christian church.’<sup>40</sup> Bultmann knows that it is a historical fact that church bodies have typically formed on the basis of natural bonds, like shared language, or for political and legal reasons. This statement more or less coheres with the *Erlangen Opinion*, but here Bultmann makes a critical inference: the fact that churches *have* organised themselves in this way does not mean that they *must* do so. The community of the church is qualified solely by the criteria of baptism and faith; there is no other relevant ‘marker.’<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See 112–14 above.

<sup>38</sup> See *Rudolf Bultmann/Paul Althaus Briefwechsel, 1929–1966*, ed. Matthias Dreher and Gotthard Jasper (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> Nygren, *The Church Controversy in Germany*, 44–45.

<sup>40</sup> *Marburg Opinion*, 290.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 290–91.

Hence for Bultmann the sacrament of baptism relativises all differences within the visible church. This distinction is vital, as he will not accept the quasi-Lutheran argument—as put forth, for instance, in the *Erlangen Opinion*—that this trans-ethnic principle applies to the invisible church, but not to the concrete manifestation and external organisation of the visible church.<sup>42</sup>

Limitations appear, however, just at the point where Bultmann's theology of baptism shows promise for the genuine inclusion of Jewish persons in the church. This theology of baptism, in other words, is in constant danger of drastically obscuring, if not obliterating, Jewish particularity. He puts the matter bluntly: 'The baptised Jew is for the church no longer a Jew.'<sup>43</sup> This conclusion threatens to swallow Jewish identity. Here again, like Althaus and Bonhoeffer, Bultmann is working within a deeply supersessionist framework wherein Jewishness is almost totally eclipsed by Christianness, even though he insists that both the Jew and the Gentile are to sacrifice their respective ethnic identities in exchange for a new identity 'beyond Jewishness and Greekness [*jenseits von Judentum und Greichentum*].'<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the *Marburg Opinion* does call the entire order of *Volkstum* into question before the reality of the church:

Further, one may not argue that *Rasse* and *Volkstum*, as *Schöpfungsordnungen*, are not to be ignored, but rather respected by the church. . . . The maintenance of *Rasse* and *Volkstum* as goods of creation is not otherwise possible other than in the fact that it joins these things together in itself and proclaims to each the vocation of its particularity [*Berufung*]

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<sup>42</sup> 'One may not say that this unity only applies to the invisible church while in the visible church the barriers which divide people must otherwise be respected and allowed' (*Marburg Opinion*, 290–91). This statement can be read as a direct contradiction of the claims of the *Erlangen Opinion*.

<sup>43</sup> *Marburg Opinion*, 292. This insight proves problematic. In separating the 'Jewish Question' into two separate questions, one theological and one political, Bultmann, like Bonhoeffer, authorises the state to restrict the rights of Jews in the secular sphere even while he refuses to enforce those regulations in the church.

<sup>44</sup> See Bultmann, 'Der Arier-Paragraph,' 369. He argues elsewhere that the New Testament writers were not thinking in terms of racial identity; for the biblical writers, 'Jew' and 'Pagan' are categories used to describe a spiritual condition, not a distinction regarding 'ethnic-individualities [*Volksindividualitäten*].' Strictly speaking, then, the New Testament can offer no solution to the *Rassenfrage*. Since for the New Testament authors race has no bearing on the question of fitness for ministry, Bultmann concludes that race and ethnicity are likewise irrelevant in his own context. See Bultmann, et al., 'Neues Testament und Rassenfrage,' 294–95.

*seiner Besonderheit*] as well as the responsibility of its segregation [*Verschuldung seiner Absonderung*]. Otherwise, veneration of the creation usurps the place of veneration of the creator.<sup>45</sup>

Though the Marburg Faculty are trafficking in the language of ethnic segregation, the statement still represents an improvement over the *Erlangen Opinion* insofar as it casts a trans-ethnic vision of the church. The accompanying essay, ‘Neues Testament und Rassenfrage,’ reinforces the point by emphasising the ‘total equality’ [*völlige Gleichheit*] accomplished by baptism. Where it concerns baptised Jewish-Christians, ‘the thought that confirmation to pastoral office in the community should be governed according to the standpoint of ethnic-racial belonging is out of the question.’<sup>46</sup>

Most important for this present study, however, is the way Bultmann positions the orders of creation with respect to the church in his December 1933 essay, ‘Der Arier-Paragraph im Raume der Kirche.’ Here Bultmann is engaging directly with the *Erlangen Opinion* by targeting its confused ecclesiology. In his view the Erlangen theologians have fundamentally misunderstood the nature of the church and have grossly misconstrued biblical counsel.<sup>47</sup> Whereas a Jew might be a Jew in the secular world of state and government, says Bultmann, ‘[f]or the church, Jewish Christians are simply Christians.’<sup>48</sup> Here again we encounter the danger mentioned above; namely, Bultmann seems to dissolve Jewish particularity. However, the isolation of Althaus and Elert’s distorted ecclesiology is part of his wider critique of their application of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*. Bultmann’s

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<sup>45</sup> *Marburg Opinion*, 292–93.

<sup>46</sup> Bultmann, et al., ‘Neues Testament und Rassenfrage,’ 295.

<sup>47</sup> Bultmann suggests that the *Erlangen Opinion*’s conclusions rest on an erroneous interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:20 (‘Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called’). In Bultmann’s reading, the Apostle is affirming the various stations (gender, marital status, occupation, etc.) for a Christian’s existence in society, but is making the explicit point that these stations do not claim any validity in the church. For Bultmann, Althaus and Elert have got this passage exactly wrong. See ‘Der Arier-Paragraph,’ 363.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

supersessionist impulses aside, his insight nonetheless offers useful resources for repair of the doctrine.

Perhaps the most serious problem with the *Erlangen Opinion*, in Bultmann's view, is that it does not know when to surrender its commitment to the orders of creation in the face of God's absolute command. 'Do the Erlangers not realise,' he wonders, 'that under certain circumstances, God's claim demands precisely that we ignore, break, and surrender such ordinances?' He interrogates the assumptions of the *Erlangen Opinion* further: 'Can we really talk about the mood of the *Volk* [*Volksempfinden*] as sacrosanct when it comes to the claim of God?'<sup>49</sup> As a Lutheran dogmatician, Bultmann affirms the orders, but not in every circumstance. In particular, the orders can gain no currency inside the church, where every 'natural' determination is called into question and deprived of any claim to ultimate validity. After all, he reasons, if one is simply going to obey the orders universally and without qualification in every circumstance, the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* is a faulty basis for Christian ethics.<sup>50</sup> The dynamism of Bultmann's proposal thus provides a critical counterbalance to Althaus' ethical schema, which can at times appear rigid and static in its unsophisticated obedience to the dictates of nature.

Indeed, Bultmann exposes a gaping blind spot in Althausian theology simply by raising a pointed question: 'Is not German spiritual life itself a historical phenomenon?' If this is the case, then the divine spiritual vocation of the *Volk*, upon which Althaus places enormous weight, is itself subject to the profound ambiguity of all created existence and thus capable not only of good, but of immense evil. This, as we have seen, is something that Althaus knew but did not always practice. As the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

essay builds toward its climax, Bultmann strikes the raw nerve of Althaus'

ecclesiology as expressed in the *Erlangen Opinion*:

If the church wants to have an effect toward the blessing of the *Volk* and state in the new *Reich*, it can do this only if it fulfills its own specific mission unflinchingly and courageously; only when it does not deceive itself about the fact that its critical task [*ihre kritische Aufgabe*] must hold it in constant tension with *Volk*-consciousness [*Volksbewußtsein*]. . . . A church which constantly speaks only out of its efforts to conform to the sensibility of the *Volk* [*aus deren Bemühungen um Volkstümlichkeit*] and out of a faddish concern with relevance, whether out of industrious zeal or thinly-veiled fear, will only make itself despicable.<sup>51</sup>

When the church accommodates a penultimate phenomenon—in this case, crazed *völkisch* nationalism—it forfeits its true prophetic task. Any church that obsesses with national identity, either out of zeal or out of fear, will become pathetic. Here, then, Bultmann calls the church away from capitulation to prevailing culture to courageous criticism of prevailing culture—a *kritische Aufgabe* which, he warns, is dangerous and not glorious.

As is the case with Bonhoeffer, Bultmann's solution is not without its problems. In particular, Jewishness is washed away, if not drowned, by the waters of baptism. Yet that same theology of baptism holds great promise for thinking about how the church might position itself to so-called 'foreigners' in its own midst, even while it is unclear whether it offers much in the way of engaging Jews as such, that is, outside the Christian community. Nevertheless, Bultmann produces an alternative Lutheran vision in which the structuring institutions of creation are preserved but put in their right order—that is, subordinated to the church rather than subordinated to the *Volk*. By appealing to the sacramental character of the church, Bultmann articulates the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* in such a way as to avoid the pitfall of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 369.

xenophobic ecclesiology.

### THREE | AGAINST VÖLKISCH HERESY: HERMANN SASSE (1895–1976)

Challenges to the underpinnings of Althaus' *völkisch* theological system came, as we have seen, from both Germany and farther afield, yet among the most incisive critiques came from the office of Hermann Sasse, just a few steps down the hallway in Erlangen's theology faculty. As Erlangen theologians, Althaus and Sasse shared a passionate commitment to the Lutheran Confessions. Both were concerned for the ongoing health and vitality of Lutheranism in Germany—and both feared for its future. Yet in spite of their commonalities, their ecclesial decisions during the early years of the Third Reich show a significant divergence. Sasse, for instance, worked with Bonhoeffer on the early drafts of the *Bethel Confession*, which rejected any attempt to divide the church along *völkisch* lines. Sasse's public record of opposition to National Socialist ideology—he had been arrested by the party for denouncing its political platform in 1933—made him a natural candidate to collaborate on the *Confession*.<sup>52</sup> Sasse had also been an outspoken opponent of the implementation of the Aryan Paragraph in the DEK, which put him at odds with his colleagues Althaus and Elert.<sup>53</sup> In this regard Sasse represents a strain of Lutheran thought—indeed, within Althaus' very own Erlangen tradition—that is uneasy with the codification of the *Volk* as a theologically prescriptive entity.<sup>54</sup> As such, he is a

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<sup>52</sup> For Sasse's criticism of point 24 ('positive Christianity') of the party platform, see Cochrane, *The Church's Confession*, 78. Loewenich recounts the story of Sasse's arrest and acquittal in *Erlebte Theologie*, 133. For Sasse's role in the drafting of the *Bethel Confession*, see Guy Carter, 'Confession at Bethel, August 1933—Enduring Witness: The Formation, Revision, and Significance of the First Full Theological Confession of the Evangelical Church Struggle in Nazi Germany' (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1987), 66–67, 73–83.

<sup>53</sup> Green reports that Sasse and Althaus had a contentious relationship. Sasse had apparently questioned the Lutheranness of Althaus' theology of the Lord's Supper to begin with, and matters were only made worse by Sasse's 'unflattering descriptions' of the other members of the Erlangen faculty during denazification. See *The Erlangen School*, 295–96.

<sup>54</sup> Walter Künneth, who joined Althaus and Sasse on the Erlangen faculty in the mid-1940s, is another such representative. Künneth also emphasised the 'ambiguity' [*Zweideutigkeit*] of the *Volk*, which, like all other ordinances of creation, is suspended between God and the devil. Interestingly, though, his account of the *Volk* evidences clear signs of Althaus' influence—including a sympathetic reference to the *Verdrängungsgesetz*. Still,

useful guide in the construction of non-essentialising and non-totalising theologies of creation and church.

We can only stretch Sasse's differences from Althaus so far. Indeed, what makes Sasse such an interesting foil to Althaus is the fact that, at least in the secular sphere, the two mostly share a commitment to the same *völkisch* ontology. Even though, as mentioned above, Sasse suggests that the Lutheran Confessions do not prescribe an authoritative theology of *Volkstum*, he does consider them to provide some resources for the theological interpretation of ethnic identity, insofar as they are concerned with God's preservation of the world.<sup>55</sup> Even so, for Sasse, the *Volk* does not qualify as an ordinance of creation.<sup>56</sup> With that said, however, he does at times sympathise with Althaus' romanticised portrait of the *Volk*, and his schema shows a close ideological proximity to Althaus on this point. Even while he stresses that an exclusive focus on the biological factors of ethnic origination leads *ad absurdum*, for example, Sasse also speaks of 'the peculiar We' [*das merkwürdige Wir*] of the *Volk*—a concept cognate to Althaus' 'we-consciousness [*Wir-Bewußtsein*].' This 'peculiar We' is a mystery that originates in the 'call' [*Beruf*] of the 'Lord of History.' Once a *Volk* accepts this call, it behaves as a 'collective person

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Künne concludes that *Völker* are 'interim realities in world history' that can express no 'ultimate or permanent value.' See Künne, *Politik zwischen Dämon und Gott*, 199–204. It is not insignificant that Künne, like Sasse, rejected the adoption of the Aryan Paragraph in German churches, although his rhetoric on the 'Jewish Question' is similar to that of Althaus. See Ruth Zerner, 'German Protestant Responses to Nazi Persecution of the Jews,' in *Perspectives on the Holocaust*, ed. Randolph L. Braham, Holocaust Studies Series (Boston, MA: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1983), 62–63.

<sup>55</sup> For Sasse, the Lutheran Confessions are fundamentally documents for the church, and thus show little interest in the 'national question [*die nationale Frage*].' One reason for this is that the reformers have no awareness of the modern consciousness of the biological makeup of a particular *Volk*; more than this, however, they are more concerned with unity of doctrine, which can transcend ethnic differences while maintaining ethnic particularity.

<sup>56</sup> Sasse, *Das Volk*, 14–18, 24–25. Sasse finds the terms *Schöpfungsordnung* and *Erhaltungsordnung* equally confusing and problematic, and prefers the language of 'divine order' [*göttliche Ordnung*] or 'God's order' [*Gottesordnung*] instead (22).



[*Kollektivperson*].<sup>57</sup> These similarities notwithstanding, Althaus and Sasse disagreed about how the doctrine of *Volkstum* should be applied in the church's witness and practice. The crucial distinction between them, it seems to me, is that Sasse will not allow the *Volk*—or indeed any arbitrary human standard—to determine the constitution of the church. This is a point that comes through strongly in his 1936 book *Was heißt lutherisch?*, to which we turn now.

Like Bonhoeffer, Sasse sees the glorification of *Volkstum* as a symptom of a larger problematic within Lutheran theology: namely, a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the Lutheran Reformation which manifests in a distorted version of contemporary Lutheranism. Sasse therefore seeks to dispel three erroneous construals of the Reformation: 1) the 'heroic interpretation' [*die heroische Deutung*], which reduces the Reformation to a cult of personality around Luther; 2) the 'history of culture interpretation' [*die kulturgeschichtliche Deutung*], which sees the Reformation as an epoch-making turning point within universal intellectual culture; and 3) the 'national interpretation' [*die nationale Deutung*], according to which the Reformation is conceived as a triumph of Germanness over and against other peoples.<sup>58</sup> It is the third misunderstanding that Sasse considers most dangerous in his own context, for reasons that he first suggests in the work's prolegomenon. Though he is a Lutheran confessionalist, Sasse argues that the temptation to identify 'Germanness' with 'Lutheranness' must be resisted: 'The Lutheran church holds a special place in the history of the German *Volk* [but] we distance ourselves

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 28. Althaus and Sasse are likely both drawing on their common Erlangen tradition here. A generation earlier, Hofmann had spoken of the *Bewußtsein der Zugehörigkeit* ('consciousness of belonging') that each member of a given *Volk* shares. See Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 43.

<sup>58</sup> See Hermann Sasse, *Was heißt lutherisch?*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1936), 31–59.

completely, however, from the national-ecclesial misunderstanding of the Reformation and the false equation of “Lutheran” and “German.””<sup>59</sup>

This insight indicates just how widely the Ecumenical Movement had broadened Sasse’s horizons.<sup>60</sup> But this rejection of the essential identification of Germanness and Lutheranness is also part of his larger effort to discredit any notion of a ‘species-specific confession’ [*artgemäße Konfession*], a concept with troubling ramifications. At the same time, Sasse is willing to acknowledge that Lutheranism is ‘at home’ in Germany and the Scandinavian nations. Of course, that national churches have developed around shared cultural dispositions (as is the case with, for example, Anglicanism in England or Calvinism in Switzerland, Holland, and Scotland) is simply a ‘historical fact’ [*geschichtliche Tatsache*].<sup>61</sup> But Sasse stops here; the mere ‘historical fact’ that Germany has traditionally been Lutheran is no basis at all upon which to conclude that Lutheranism is *essentially* German. More critically, the mere historical reality of these churches does not mean that national boundaries and confessional boundaries are coterminous.

We return now to the ‘national interpretation’ of the Reformation to flesh out the ethical implications of Sasse’s insight:

[This interpretation] is the view that the Reformation which had its beginning in Wittenberg is to be understood in its deepest essence as an event of

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 19. Cf. Sasse, *Das Volk*, 6–7.

<sup>60</sup> Sasse had been involved in the Ecumenical Movement since 1927, including a term on the Executive Committee of the First World Conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne, Switzerland. Though he remained a strict Lutheran confessionalist for his entire career, he was always an active player in ecumenical conversions, including with Rome. In 1949 Sasse accepted a call to Immanuel Seminary in North Adelaide, Australia, where he served until the end of his life. See Ronald R. Feuerhahn, ‘Hermann Sasse (1895–1976): A Biographical Sketch,’ in Hermann Sasse, *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters, Volume 1 (1927–1939)*, trans. Matthew C. Harrison, et al. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 13–21.

<sup>61</sup> Sasse, *Was heißt lutherisch?*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 19–20. Sasse had begun to develop this point in his earlier work, where he described the ‘social form’ [*Sozialgestalt*] of the church as determined by the particularities of individual peoples (language, cultural custom, etc.). However, this development is merely accidental, not essential: ‘It does not belong to the essence of the church that it must exist in any one particular sociological relationship. It can also subsist, and has subsisted, where there is no talk of the existence of a *Volk* or a nation.’ In short, there is only one Gospel—not a German gospel, an English gospel, or a Spanish gospel—that determines the church (Sasse, *Das Volk*, 11–12).

German national history . . . and that its goal—unfortunately left unachieved at that time but open to be accomplished today—is the establishment of a German national-church [*deutsche Nationalkirche*] which could become the religious home [*Heimat*] of the German *Volk*.<sup>62</sup>

Sasse deals with this misconception of the Reformation in the harshest possible terms, labeling it a ‘heresy [*Irrlehre*].’ This kind of thinking, he warns, is especially dangerous precisely because it is partially correct—that is, because it ‘clothes lies in half-truths.’<sup>63</sup> Sasse does not dispute, in other words, that the Lutheran Reformation is of central significance for German history and even for German identity. What he does reject, however, is an essentialising and totalising conflation of Lutheranness and Germanness: ‘Whoever understands the Reformation as a Germanisation of the church . . . has misunderstood the Reformation.’<sup>64</sup>

Sasse’s criticisms should be understood as directed primarily at the *Deutsche Christen* and more radical *völkisch* elements within the DEK. However, they are relevant also for an appraisal of Althaus, who had already drawn a disastrously shortsighted connection between Martin Luther and Adolf Hitler based exactly on the kind of Germanist interpretation of the Reformation that Sasse is concerned with here.<sup>65</sup> As I have shown, Althaus also comes perilously close to a complete

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 50. He continues:

The Lutheran Reformation does not call for German Christianity, but for the truth of the gospel. . . . The Lutheran Reformation never and nowhere calls for that which is German, but it does call for that which is true, calls for that which is the saving truth of God for all people and therefore—and only therefore—for Germans as well. . . . There is only one gospel for all peoples, just as there is only one Christ for all humans and ethnic groups. There is no ‘German Christ’ and there is likewise no German faith in Christ which is ‘species-specific’ [*artgemäße*] for us Germans (58–59).

<sup>65</sup> The analogy appears in Paul Althaus, ‘Luther,’ *Zeitwende* 9:2 (1933), 353:

Martin Luther, the reformer and church father, is still the most monumental leader and prophet with which our *Volk* has been gifted, the most German of Germans, our incomparable tutor in Germanness. At one time the German *Volk* celebrated him as the liberator from foreign [*artfremder*] spiritual and religious tyranny, as the voice of German wrath against the Roman essence both in church and in nation. Germans of 1933 are right to praise him as the most powerful awakener of our *Volk* to itself, as a magnificent incarnation of German *Volkstum*—and here one may place the name of Martin Luther and the name of the German *Führer* side by side.

identification of the German spirit with Lutheran belief and practice.<sup>66</sup> He had used this conflation of ‘German’ and ‘Lutheran’ in his wider writings on the ‘Jewish Question’ to make genuine inclusion in German society almost completely impossible for Jewish persons. This same ethno-spiritual amalgamation animates the *Erlangen Opinion*, which makes authentic ‘Germanness’ a prerequisite for full and unqualified belonging in the DEK. In fact, argues Axel Töllner, conversion to Lutheranism and conversion to German *Volkstum* amount essentially to the same thing in the Althausian paradigm.<sup>67</sup> Ironically, though, according to Althaus’ concept of ‘spiritual types,’ Jews could not be fully Lutheran because they could not be fully German, and they could not be fully German because they could not be fully Lutheran—and this meant that they would always be second-class citizens in the church and in wider society.

The logic of Sasse’s account, however, subverts Althaus’ *völkisch* programme specifically by undermining the notion of ‘incompatible spiritual types,’ a concept that forms the bedrock of Althaus’ theology of the ‘Jewish Question.’<sup>68</sup> He does so by retrieving the Reformation emphasis on the utter passivity of faith, which he sees as the basis for an authentically Lutheran ecclesiology. Faith alone dictates the character of the church; the true community of God will not be determined by any external human factor, including ethnic identity. Thus for Sasse a correct understanding of the Reformation is vital for clear ethical judgment in his contemporary situation:

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It must be said, however, that Althaus, like Sasse, believes Luther’s most important legacy is not for German *Volkstum* but for the church. Still, as this citation makes clear, Althaus was susceptible to nationalist readings of the Reformation.

<sup>66</sup> See 55–57 and 134–38 above.

<sup>67</sup> See Töllner, *Eine Frage der Rasse?*, 62–63.

<sup>68</sup> See 65–66 and 123–25 above.

But when one starts not with humanity but with God, as the Confessions of the Reformation do; when one starts not with human religion—not even with Christian religion—but with the Gospel; when one has understood what faith, in the evangelical sense, really is, faith which is awakened by the Holy Spirit, faith in the Word of God, in distinction to all human religion within the bounds of pure and practical rationality and which is never brought forth ‘out of our own reason or strength’: then one comes to an understanding of the church in the Reformation sense, an understanding of the church which we do not build, but which God alone creates, where God truly is God, where Jesus Christ truly is Lord, where the Word of God, the Word of the creator and the perfecter, of the judge and the reconciler, is the greatest power in the world. The concept of the church, both for Luther and for Lutheranism, springs from faith in this Word. In this concept of the church, man [*der Mensch*]<sup>69</sup>—whether as an individual or as a *Volk*—can never play a founding or a co-founding role in the church. He is passive.<sup>69</sup>

It is precisely for this reason that Sasse considers the *Volk*-church impulse to be ‘one of the most dangerous heresies [*einer der gefährlichsten Irrlehren*].’<sup>70</sup> Even moderate expressions of this impulse—such as Althaus’ vision of *Volkskirchentum*, by which the church conforms its proclamation and external organisation to the demands of the *Volk*’s historical destiny<sup>71</sup>—represents a mortal threat to the church’s essence. By Sasse’s rubric, then, an ecclesial schematic such as Althaus’ rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of Lutheranism.

## CONCLUSION | ALTHAUS AS PSEUDO-LUTHERAN?

Is Althaus, in Bonhoefferian terms, a pseudo-Lutheran? Such a conclusion, in my view, overstates the case. However, it is worth remembering that it was not only the Reformed, but also Lutherans who questioned the assumptions and outcomes of Althaus’ unique formulation of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*. Though his critics share his supersessionist framework, along with its mischaracterisation of Jewish existence, each nevertheless offers an important corrective to Althausian theology.

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<sup>69</sup> Sasse, *Das Volk*, 14.

<sup>70</sup> Sasse, *Was heißt lutherisch?*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 49.

<sup>71</sup> See 224–25 above.

Bonhoeffer helps us to diagnose Althaus' tendency toward 'two-realm' thinking, which fails to subject the *Volk* to the total claim of the single *Gotteswirklichkeit* manifest in Jesus Christ. Bultmann exposes Althaus' impoverished ecclesiology, which denies the unifying power of the church's sacraments. Sasse undercuts the segregationist logic that drives Althaus' nativist application of the doctrine of the orders of creation. All three call for a *sola fide* ecclesiology: the church, both visible and invisible, must have faith as its lone criterion. Viewed from this perspective, one might say, when Althaus prioritises the autonomy of *Volkstum* above the *communio*, the problem is not that he is being too Lutheran, but rather that he is not being Lutheran enough.

It is difficult to dispute that Althaus' ethics, rooted in a particularly militant permutation of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*, took virulent xenophobic shape—a development that proved especially problematic in his theology of the 'Jewish Question.' But there is room, it seems to me, to suggest that this did not necessarily have to be the case. That is to say, if we read Althaus against himself, we discover that there are mechanisms in place in his theology to prevent the demonic distortion of the orders that culminates in the idolisation of the *Volk*. The issue is that in his ecclesial practice—in the *performance* of his theology—Althaus overrides these mechanisms. Indeed, the most perverse irony in Althausian social ethics is that it is precisely the continued existence of Jewish persons that is meant to hold *völkisch* hyper-nationalism in check. Having reckoned carefully with these self-defeating tendencies, I think at least this much can be said: the destructive glorification of the *Volk*—and the troubling byproduct of a system in which the *Volk* is normative for ethics—is neither the natural and inevitable outcome of Althausian theology (chapter 8), nor is it the natural and inevitable outcome of Lutheran theology (chapter 9).

## CHAPTER X | CONCLUSION

A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil; a theologian of the cross calls a thing what it is.

Martin Luther, *Disputatio Heidelbergae habita*<sup>1</sup>

### ONE | 'DARK, DEPRESSING RIDDLE': ALTHAUS, JEWS, AND THE POST-SHOAH IMAGINATION

'Dark, depressing riddle'—that is how Paul Althaus characterised the nature of Jewish existence in 1932.<sup>2</sup> Beginning with his earliest writings on the *Judenfrage* during the years of the Weimar Republic, Althaus puzzled over the Jews, a strange and dangerous people who threaten to infect German society and yet who bear a mysterious theological meaning. As I have shown in chapters two and three, Althaus came to interpret Jewish existence according to a *dialectic of pathology and performance*. On the one hand, he always confronted Jewish nature as *pathological*; that is, he believed the demoralising spirituality of the Jews to be infectious and, if not contained, lethal. He conceived of Jews as pathogens who must be quarantined to protect German *Volkstum* and to safeguard the German destiny. On the other hand, though, he saw Jewish existence as *performative*. He never envisioned the expulsion or eradication of German Jews because, despite the danger they pose, their stubborn existence signifies deep spiritual truths.

Althausian theology is thoroughly supersessionist. He rejected expressions of chiliasm which require the Jews for the consummation of salvation-history. The ambitions of 'Israel,' and any concomitant salvific purpose, have met their end in Jesus of Nazareth, says Althaus, and the church is now the true people of God. But

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Disputatio Heidelbergae habita* (1518), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1883–2009), 1:354. Translation mine.

<sup>2</sup> Althaus, *Römer* (1932), 100–01.

his system still needs ‘Jews’ to fulfill a number of indirect salvation-historical tasks: namely, to interrupt ethnic and racial homogeneity, to frustrate the presumptive hubris of all societies, and to portend the coming Kingdom of God. The ‘eternal Jew’ now wanders restless about the earth as a sign and warning to all other peoples. But beyond these broad theological functions, Jews also hold a unique value for Germans in particular. Althaus considered the Jews, as well as their history as recounted in the Old Testament, cryptic keys to German self-understanding. He made this point most explicitly in his postwar sermons, where he very nearly identifies the German and Jewish destinies. The story of Germany is the story of Israel narrated in a different register: both peoples are a royal priesthood entrusted (and burdened) with uncommon insight into the things of God. Germans, like Jews, must follow a long and lonely road; but while there is yet hope for Germans, the historical fate of the Jews has been sealed at the crucifixion.

The deep-seated paradox of Althaus’ theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ is best expressed, then, according to the dialect of pathology and performance which I have offered throughout: to include the Jews fully is to contract their sickness which leads unto spiritual and moral death (pathology); to exclude the Jews fully is to lose a critical component of both the Christian and the German identity (performance). The resultant theological vision is *inclusive quarantine*, wherein Jews are retained within German societies, both civil and ecclesial, but always confined to the margins. This, of course, is an innovative but recognisable permutation of the witness people mythology. In Althaus’ thought-world, the Jews can neither thrive nor perish, but must always negotiate a perilous existence on the peripheries of communities that simultaneously fear them and need them. André Fischer was near the mark when he wrote that Althaus thinks of Jews as ‘a foreign *Volk next to*—but not *against*—



Germans.<sup>3</sup> While this conclusion is true enough, I would add that, for Althaus, Jews *are* against Germans inasmuch as they threaten German *Volkstum* (such as when they manifest as *Weltjudentum*), but they are also an indispensable ingredient for healthy *Volksgemeinschaft*. In the final analysis, then, they must remain *a part of and apart from* the peoples around them.

By using this dialectic as an interpretive grid, as I have done in chapters four and five, we can illuminate elements of the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph*—an important artefact both of the *Kirchenkampf* and of the history of Christian antisemitism—that remain obscured without a thorough understanding of Althaus’ wider theologies of creation, the *Volk*, and the ‘Jewish Question.’ This research, then, contributes to our understanding of how Christian theology has struggled to engage with Christians of Jewish descent (not to mention Jews as such) on account of impoverished ecclesiologies that issue from corrupted doctrines of creation. As became clear across chapters six and seven, Althaus could not quite relinquish his dialectical theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ even after the horrors of the National Socialism and its ‘Final Solution’ had come to light. While he did recognise that his *völkisch* views had become untenable after the *Shoah*, he only gradually came to de-emphasise the pathological dimension of Jewish existence. As he did that, however, he simultaneously stripped contemporary Jewish life and practice of any purpose.

Chapters eight and nine wrestled with the consequences of Althaus’ toxic formulation of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* for Lutheran dogmatics and social ethics, with particular reference to ecclesiology vis-à-vis ‘foreigners.’ In this respect,

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<sup>3</sup> Fischer, *Zwischen Zeugnis und Zeitgeist*, 522. Emphasis in the original.

the thesis, while focused narrowly on Althaus, also opens up broader vistas for considering articulations of Lutheran doctrine—including proposals from Bonhoeffer, Bultmann, and Sasse—which hold greater promise for meaningful engagement with Christians of Jewish descent and, perhaps, with Jews as Jews. The full scope of repair, of course, lies beyond the purview of this project; however, I have endeavored to show that inclusive quarantine (or other expressions of ethnic segregation more generally) was not an inevitable outcome of the Althausian theological system; it is not the inevitable outcome of Lutheran ethics as such; and it need not be an inevitable outcome for Christian theology after the *Shoah*. Nevertheless, Althaus is useful for diagnosing serious problems with Christian theologies of Judaism, precisely because, contextually speaking, his theology of the ‘Jewish Question’ was quite moderate. That is, his is not the kind of rabid antisemitism that one can easily dismiss as ‘un-Christian.’ On the contrary, his proposal to both reject and accept Jews is the product of a diseased imagination, the traces of which contemporary Christian theologians can still find in themselves if they know where to look.

In the end, the dialectic of pathology and performance collapsed because if Althaus could not speak of Jews as reprobate, he found that he had very little else to say about them. Because Christian thinkers have so deeply imbibed the witness people tradition, where pathology (read: curse) is so closely linked to performance (read: witness), they still find themselves in Althaus’ same dilemma. Theological speech, not least theological speech about Jews, is remarkably difficult after the *Shoah*, in part because the relationship between Jews and Christians is not reciprocal. This is the case on a number of levels, but at the centre of the dilemma is the reality that Christians must account for Judaism as part of Christian self-understanding

while the inverse is not true for Jews.<sup>4</sup> In short, Christian theologians know they must say *something* about Jews, but they are not sure what—especially in light of the *Shoah*. This often makes ‘dialogue’ between Christians and Jews a clumsy affair, as the conversation sometimes struggles to go beyond (superficial and platitudinous) moral commonalities or agreements to ‘work together’ in and for the world.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Christian reflection upon ecclesiology in particular is fraught with difficulties in a post-*Shoah* world. Christians, as Katie Leggett has shown, continue to recycle anti-Judaic ideas and distorted conceptions of Jews and Jewish practice, even when (especially when?) making a conscious effort not to do so.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, a persistent tendency to interpret Jewish experience theologically reveals the profound irony of much Holocaust Theology, as Stephen Haynes has observed:

In its contention that the church’s departure from God’s purposes is disclosed in oppression of the Jew, Christian Holocaust Theology reiterates a tenet of Christian theologians of nearly two millennia: God’s presence and activity in a fallen and ambiguous world can nevertheless be perceived in the fortunes of the Jew. . . . In earlier theologies the fate of the Jew functioned as a *sign of God’s judgment upon Israel for refusing to embrace the truth manifest in the church*. By contrast, Holocaust Theology divines in the fate of the Jews *a sign of God’s judgment on the church for refusing to recognize the truth manifest in Israel*. Thus, the notion that history is the arena of God’s judgment—a notion long relied on by Christian thinkers to explain or justify Jewish misfortune—undergoes an inversion in the creative rethinking of the

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<sup>4</sup> The dilemma is summarised well by Immanuel Jakobovits:

. . . any parleys between Judaism and Christianity would be between two essentially unequal partners on several counts, quite apart from the gross disparity in dominance and numbers in Christian lands. Christianity may well have seen a need officially to define its doctrinal attitudes towards the faith from which it emerged and eventually broke away. But neither the recognition of this need nor the resultant relationship can be entirely reciprocal. Judaism, antedating Christianity by many centuries, had no occasion or cause to include in its official doctrines any formal views on a faith which sprang up long after these doctrines were formulated in all essentials. It lies in the nature of their history that the New Testament can refer to the Old, whilst the Old cannot refer to the New.

See ‘Inter-Faith Relations—Advances and Limits’ (12 June 1971), in *The Timely and the Timeless: Jews, Judaism and Society in a Storm-Tossed Decade* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1977), 120.

<sup>5</sup> For a Jewish critique, for example, of the problematic concessions made by the authors of *Dabru Emet*, see Jon Levenson, ‘How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue,’ *Commentary* 112:5 (2001), 31–37.

<sup>6</sup> See Katie Leggett, ‘Reconsidering Otherness in the Shadow of the Holocaust: Some Proposals for Post-Holocaust Ecclesiology’ (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2014), especially 192–217. Leggett notes that some Holocaust Theologians, in their compensatory efforts to reconcile with Judaism, stress the commonalities between the two faiths in ways that are facile, historically dubious, or theologically untrue.

Holocaust Theologians. However, despite their intention to overturn the tradition they have inherited, the Holocaust Theologians actually recapitulate the formal characteristics of this tradition: as superlative symbols of Christian apostasy, Jewish history, Jewish survival, and Jews themselves are reinvested with the unique signifying function they have so often possessed in the Christian imagination.<sup>7</sup>

The witness people mythology is not overcome but rather is perpetuated even when Jewish existence is assigned a positive or constructive value—as it is, at least partially, in the Althausian theology of the ‘Jewish Question.’ Regardless of whether Jews play an ‘angelic’ or a ‘demonic’ role, the matrix through which Jewish existence is interpreted remains fundamentally unchanged.<sup>8</sup> Put another way: even if, in the words of K. Hannah Holtschneider, the mythology has been ‘turned inside out’ in post-Holocaust theology—that is, even if ‘negative connotations have been invested with positive meaning’<sup>9</sup>—Jews are nonetheless instrumentalised when they are made to *perform*.

Although in much Christian Holocaust Theology the Jews’ function in the mythology has changed from curse to blessing, they remain objects and didactic tools when Christians interpret Jewish experience, chiefly the *Shoah*, as a locus of revelation for Christianity. Yet, so far as I can see, there is no straightforward solution to this dilemma. Christians must continue to do Christian theology and must continue to talk about Christianity’s relationship to Judaism—and all of that speech must reckon with the *Shoah*. Althaus’ eventual silence about the ‘Jewish Question’ may point to a larger crisis in Christian theology: is it appropriate for Christians to comment on the meaning of Jewish experience after the *Shoah*? In this sense, Jewish existence remains as much a riddle for Christian theology after the *Shoah* as it was

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen Haynes, ‘Christian Holocaust Theology: A Critical Reassessment,’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXII:2 (1994), 555–56. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>8</sup> Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 5–6.

<sup>9</sup> Holtschneider, *German Protestants*, 36.

for Althaus. I am afraid I can give little in the way of answers except a warning against saying too much, a practice still characteristic of much post-Holocaust theology. This is where, perhaps, Luther's *theologia crucis* might offer a place to start—or, better, a place to stop.

## **TWO | 'OPEN WOUNDS': TOWARD AN ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE CROSS**

A theologian of glory, says Luther, calls evil good and good evil. This has proven true for the predominance of Christian thinking about Jews since the very beginnings of the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition. Yet specifically modern 'theologies of glory'—of which the Althausian theology of *Volk* is a good example—are at their core a perversion of the Lutheran tradition.<sup>10</sup> As an almost inevitable byproduct, theologies of glory assign positive value to Jewish suffering and displacement. These approaches to Judaism are at once supersessionist and triumphalist (and what is triumphalism if not the obverse of supersessionism?): Jewish *pathology*—Jewish 'failure' and misery—is *performative*. By demanding that Jews perform this or that theological task, whether it be the negative tasks of the classic expression of the witness people mythology or even the 'positive' tasks of testifying to God's providence or to the limits of human achievement (as in Althaus), these theologies *call evil good*. That is to say, they try to invest the senseless suffering of Jewish persons with a spiritual significance for the benefit of others. In short, these theologies seek to make Jewish pain redemptive, a tendency reflected in the use of the word 'Holocaust' to describe the genocide of the Jews.

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<sup>10</sup> Haustein warns: any theology of the *Volk* which claims "God is on our side" is un-Lutheran! The theology of the *Volk* expressed in the *Ansbacher Ratschlag*, and the one-sided interpretation of Luther upon which it rests, says Haustein, has forgotten the *theologia crucis*: 'Finally, God's acting in history is only to be conceived according to the "theologia crucis," that is, in the affliction and downfall of a *Volk* or a country, never in its victories' (see 'Der "Ansbacher Ratschlag,"' 226–27).

And yet the industrialised murder of the Jews threatens to dismantle all logics, every system of coherence. The fact that Western tongues have strained under the burden of naming the Event reflects this paradigmatic breakdown; the multiplicity of (inadequate) terms, argues Omer Bartov, ‘may signify a confusion as to [the Event’s] essence, an unease with its presence, fear and anxiety at calling it *what it really is*.’<sup>11</sup> But a theologian of the cross must make some attempt to call the thing what it really is. Given the disputed semantic range and connotations of the available terms, any linguistic choice can only be made to bear so much rhetorical weight. Even so, there are good theological reasons for using ‘*Shoah*’ rather than ‘Holocaust’ to describe what was done to Jews under the Third Reich. *Shoah* comes closer to calling the thing what it actually is: destruction (and not a burnt offering or a redemptive sacrifice). Theologians of the cross refuse to domesticate Jewish suffering by making it intelligible theologically. Instead, the *theologia crucis* names the historical plight of the Jews, so often perpetrated by Christians, as evil—and then stops.

*Theologiae crucis* are anti-triumphalist and repentant. This means that the first step in any kind of dialogue, it seems to me, must be silence. The church will find space for this quiet repentance only in ‘vulnerability’ [*Verwundbarkeit*] to and an openness to be wounded by criticism, in the terminology of Lutheran ethicist

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<sup>11</sup> Omer Bartov, *Murder in our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 57. Emphasis in the original. Bartov notes that all the options are deficient: the English ‘Holocaust’ is too closely tied to notions of Judeo-Christian sacrifice and instills the murder of the Jews with unwarranted empirical or metaphysical meanings; the French *génocide* implies an analogous relationship between the murder of the Jews and the heroic suffering of the French under German occupation; and the German *Judenvernichtung*, language used by the Nazis themselves, is disturbingly clinical. And even while speakers of modern Hebrew use the more mundane *shoah* (‘disaster’), this term has sometimes been made to serve a Zionist agenda (56–60). John Petrie offers an alternative account, arguing that the word ‘holocaust’ is a ‘sensitive, chameleonic instrument’ with a wide range of (predominantly) secular meanings, none of them fixed. Petrie also raises the point that the Hebrew *shoah*, like the Greek *holokauston*, has its etymological roots in biblical texts and can also signify divine judgment. See ‘The secular word holocaust: Scholarly myths, history, and 20<sup>th</sup> century meanings,’ *Journal of Genocide Research* 2:1 (2000), 31–63.

Hans Jochen Margull.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps more than anything else, then, a careful study of Althaus' theology of the 'Jewish Question' warns the Christian theologian not to interpret the experience (suffering) of Jewish persons theologically. For the Lutheran theologian, a repudiation of *theologia gloriae* must allow that Jews speak for themselves in defining their own self-understanding. Put bluntly, the most critical lesson Christian theologians can take from Althaus is to stop telling Jews what their existence means. This fruitless effort to resolve the 'Jewish Question' by harmonising Judaism and Christianity into a 'single paradigm'<sup>13</sup> of intelligibility is the dead end to which theologies of glory lead.

In his 1932 Romans commentary Althaus depicted contemporary Jews as a 'scattered, homeless *Volk*' who are an 'open wound' [*offene Wunde*] on the bodies of their host societies. No other phrase in the Althausian corpus captures the pathological dimension of his dialectical theology of the 'Jewish Question' more poignantly: the Jews are like a wound, viscerally repulsive and liable to infection. In his own commentary ten years earlier, Karl Barth had also used *offene Wunde* language in his remarks on Romans 9–11. For Barth, however, it is Christians—and not Jews—who are the pathological community whose diseased spirituality threatens to infect others. The 'open wound' persists on the ecclesial body as a symptom of the church's perennial forgetfulness of its own sin. This incurable lesion is, paradoxically, also the remedy for triumphalist ecclesiology; it reminds the church that it exists solely by a miracle of God.<sup>14</sup> If the church is going to learn to wound others less often and less deeply, it will do so by attending to its own wounds.

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<sup>12</sup> Hans Jochen Margull, 'Verwundbarkeit: Bemerkungen zum Dialog,' *Evangelische Theologie* 34 (1974): 410–20.

<sup>13</sup> See Conway-Jones, 'Contempt or Respect?,' 71.

<sup>14</sup> See Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1922; repr., Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1978), 350f. Of course, Barth's account is not without its problems. His exegesis of Romans 9–11 is thoroughly supersessionist to

There is *Verwundbarkeit* to Althaus' thought, but he never brought these anti-triumphalist themes to full expression in his ecclesiology. He does at times, like Barth, emphasise the chronic illness of the church. Tellingly, however, he can only draw on these themes by bringing the church into problematic connection with the Jews. Ironically, when Althaus' theology of the church is at its best, he is calling for Christians to behave like his own caricature of the Jews. To say that the church needs to learn from the Jews would be merely to repeat the witness people myth; however, Althaus' *depiction* of Jewish existence would have been better applied as a description of the purpose of the church's existence. Instead of focusing on and interpreting the alleged failure of Israel, therefore, an *ecclesiologia crucis* would take on the vocation theologians like Althaus assign to the Jews.

This is a move toward which Althaus gestured in 1935, though its articulation is obviously flawed:

The church of Christ wants to take shape within every *Volk*. But no *Volk* should confuse its mission with that of the people of God or the church of Christ. No one *Volk* brings the world 'the Redeemer and a redeemed humanity,' but rather it is the community of Jesus Christ through its witness to Jesus Christ that does this. It is not the German *Volk*, but the church that is the *Gegenvolk* of the Jews.<sup>15</sup>

The language of *Gegenvolk* is too problematic to be put to constructive use, but the underlying concept might prove helpful. The cognate 'counter-part' [*das Gegenüber*] may allow us to envision the church as a *counterpart* to the Jews, holding a vocation analogous to the Jewish task as Althaus understands it. In such a scheme, the church pursues its own vocation as a people who are homeless, rootless, and scattered

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the point that he parabolises Israel's history as a didactic lesson for the church and ignores living Jewish persons almost totally. Nevertheless, Barth manages to avoid the strident antisemitic rhetoric of Althaus' commentary on the same passage.

<sup>15</sup> Althaus, 'Politisches Christentum,' 13–14. The notion of the German *Volk* as the *Gegenvolk* (anti-people) to the Jews was a widely-circulated trope during the Nazi years and appeared regularly in antisemitic propaganda. See Michael and Doerr, *Nazi-Deutsch/Nazi-German*, 178.



‘within every *Volk*.’ Instead of assigning suffering as an intrinsic dimension of Jewish existence, the church embarks on its own ‘diaspora Christianity’ as it wanders on the margins of every society, perpetually dispossessed, and transgressing over each ethnic boundary to testify to the limits of every human achievement.<sup>16</sup> In the *ecclesiologia crucis*, in other words, the church should perform the functions Althaus imagines for Jews—functions for which the Jews did not ask and do not accept.

Grave challenges remain, but the Lutheran *theologia crucis* may yet open new possibilities for an anti-triumphalist and anti-supersessionist theology of Israel. The cross of Christ frustrates any human presumption—any Christian presumption—which would claim special knowledge of the counsels of God, including the meaning and destiny of Israel. Only after the church has been rendered *silent* by the word of the cross—the word before which ‘all our deductions and conclusions; our efforts to illuminate, clarify, and provide metaphysical explanations; and our attempts at moral legitimization and aesthetic assessment come to naught’<sup>17</sup>—can it dare to speak. In the meantime, though, the Christian theologian would do well to remember the open wounds of the crucified Jew from Nazareth, and remember, too, that his body still must bleed.

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<sup>16</sup> The term ‘diaspora Christianity’ is George Lindbeck’s. See ‘Confession and Community: An Israel-like View of the Church,’ *The Christian Century* 107:16 (1990), 492. In his early work, Lindbeck had welcomed the decline of Christendom as the necessary precondition for ecclesial renewal. Even though he equivocated on that point in his later work, he continued to see ‘Israel,’ particularly as it exists in diaspora, as the type of community after which the church can model itself. Lindbeck is confident that Christians can ‘apply Israel’s story to themselves without supersessionism or triumphalism,’ but I am more skeptical about that possibility.

<sup>17</sup> Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected: Restructuring the Grammar of Christology*, trans. Jo Bennett (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 40.



**APPENDIX I | THEOLOGISCHES GUTACHTEN ÜBER DIE ZULASSUNG VON CHRISTEN JÜDISCHER HERKUNFT ZU DEN ÄMTERN DER DEUTSCHEN EVANGELISCHEN KIRCHE (ERLANGER GUTACHTEN)**

<p>An die Theologische Fakultät der Universität ist folgende Eingabe ergangen:</p> <p>„Die in Marburg versammelten Pfarrer und geistlichen und weltlichen Abgeordneten des kurhessischen Kirchentages aus den 3 Oberhessischen Kirchenkreisen der Evang. Landeskirche in Hessen-Kassel bitten die hochwürdigen Theologischen Fakultäten zu Marburg und Erlangen um eine feierliche und verantwortliche Belehrung der deutschen evangelischen Christenheit darüber, ob das von der Generalsynode der Kirche der Altpreußischen Union in diesen Tagen beschlossene und für die ganze Deutsche Evangelische Kirche in Aussicht genommene Gesetz über die Anstellungsbedingungen für Geistliche und Beamte der kirchlichen Verwaltung—den Arier-Paragraph enthaltend—der Lehre der heiligen Schrift, dem Evangelium von Jesus Christus und der Lehre der Apostel, dem Wesen der Sakramente, der Taufe und des heiligen Abendmahls, den ökumenischen Bekenntnissen und der Lehre der Reformation von der Erlösung durch Jesus Christus, von der Kirche und ihrem Amt, von Taufe und heiligem Abendmahl, sowie der Präambel der Verfassung der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche gemäß ist oder widerspricht.“</p> <p>Die Theologische Fakultät hat nach eingehender Beratung, welche die völlige Übereinstimmung in den fachlichen Forderungen ergab, ihre Vertreter der systematischen Theologie beauftragt, die Eingabe zu beantworten. Ihr Gutachten lautet wie folgt:</p> <p>Die Eingabe bezieht sich auf folgende grundlegende Bestimmungen aus dem von</p>	<p>The following petition has been issued to the theological faculty of the university:</p> <p>‘The pastors and the clerical and secular representatives of the Kurhessen church congress of the three Oberhessian church circles of the Protestant regional state church in Hessen-Kassel, who have assembled in Marburg, appeal to the highly respected theological faculties in Marburg and Erlangen for the solemn and responsible special instruction of German Protestant Christianity regarding the following questions: whether the law regarding the conditions of employment for clergy and officials<sup>1</sup> in the church administration—including the Aryan Paragraph—which in recent days has been decreed by General Synod of the church of the Old Prussian Union and is being considered for the entire <i>Deutsche Evangelische Kirche</i>, is in accordance with the teaching of Holy Scripture, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Apostles, the nature of the sacraments of baptism and the holy Eucharist, the ecumenical creeds and the doctrines of the Reformation regarding salvation through Jesus Christ, the church and its office, baptism and the holy Eucharist, as well as the preamble of the constitution of the <i>Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche</i>, or whether the law contradicts these things.’</p> <p>The faculty of theology, after in-depth deliberations which yielded a full consensus regarding the professional requirements for clergy, has commissioned its representatives in systematic theology to respond to the petition. Their expert opinion is as follows:</p> <p>The petition refers to the following basic provisions from the law regarding the legal</p>
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<sup>1</sup> I have rendered the term as ‘official,’ but it is important to note that a *Beamte* is a civil servant. Pursuant to the *Staatskirchenvertrag*, church officials are employed under the same conditions as civil servants in state bodies and are thus subject to similar duties and rights. That the effects of the Aryan Paragraph were being discussed in the church at all is a consequence of this fact.

<p>der preußischen Generalsynode angenommenen Gesetze über die Rechtsverhältnisse der Geistlichen und Kirchenbeamten:</p> <p>§I, Abs. 2. Wer nichtarischer Abstammung oder mit einer Person nichtarischer Abstammung verheiratet ist, darf nicht als Geistlicher oder Beamter der allgemeinen kirchlichen Verwaltung berufen werden. Geistliche oder Beamte arischer Abstammung, die mit einer Person nichtarischer Abstammung die Ehe eingehen, sind zu entlassen. Wer als Person nichtarischer Abstammung gelten hat bestimmt sich nach den Vorschriften der Reichsgesetze.</p> <p>§3, Abs. 2. Geistliche oder Beamte, die nichtarischer Abstammung oder mit einer Person nichtarischer Abstammung verheiratet sind, sind in den Ruhestand zu versetzen.</p> <p>Abs. 3. Von der Anwendung des Abs. 2 kann abgesehen werden, wenn besondere Verdienst um den Aufbau der Kirche im deutschen Geiste vorliegen.</p> <p>Abs. 4. Die Vorschriften des Abs. 2 gelten nicht für Geistliche und Beamte, die bereits seit dem 1. August 1914 Geistliche oder Beamte der Kirche, des Reiches, eines Landes oder einer anderen Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechtes gewesen sind oder die im Weltkriege an der Front für das Deutsche Reich oder für seine Verbündeten gestanden haben oder deren Vater oder Söhne im Weltkriege gefallen sind.</p> <p>§11. Für die Mitglieder der kirchlichen Körperschaften sowie für die Träger kirchlicher Ehrenämter gelten die Vorschriften der §§1 and 3 sinngemäß.</p> <p>Die preußische Generalsynode folgt mit diesen Bestimmungen formell der Gepflogenheit der christlichen Kirchen aller Zeiten, die Zulassung zu ihren Ämtern von der Erfüllung bestimmter persönlicher Voraussetzungen der Bewerber abhängig zu machen (1. Tim. 3,1-13). Zu diesen Voraussetzungen gehören z.B. für das geistliche Amt bereits in den bisherigen deutschen Landeskirchen außer der</p>	<p>relationships of clergy and church officials, which has been adopted by the Prussian General Synod:</p> <p>§1, Section 2. Whoever is of non-Aryan descent or is married to a person of non-Aryan descent may not be appointed as clergy or as an official of the general church administration. Clergy or officials of Aryan descent who enter into marriage with a person of non-Aryan descent are to be dismissed. The question of who qualifies as person of non-Aryan descent is to be determined according to the provisions of the Reich's statutes.</p> <p>§3, Section 2. Clergy or officials who are of non-Aryan descent or are married to a person of non-Aryan descent are to be placed into retirement.</p> <p>Section 3. The implementation of Section 2 may be waived if there exists extraordinary service toward the formation of the church in the German spirit.</p> <p>Section 4. The provisions of Section 2 do not apply for clergy and officials who have already been clergy or officials of the church, the Reich, a federal state or of another institution of a public agency since August 1, 1914, or who served at the front during the World War for the German Reich or for its allies, or who whose father or sons fell during the war.</p> <p>§11. The provisions in clauses 1 and 3 apply in the same way for members of the church body as well as for bearers of honorary church positions.</p> <p>With these stipulations, the Prussian General Synod is formally following the custom of Christian churches in all times by making admission to its offices dependent upon the fulfillment of certain personal requirements on the part of the candidate (1 Timothy 3:1-13). These prerequisite conditions for the clerical office in the German regional state churches also include, for example,</p>
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<p>deutschen Reichsangehörigkeit auch biologische Merkmale, des Alters, des Geschlechts und der körperlichen Eignung. In den angeführten Bestimmungen ist die Forderung arischer Abstammung neu hinzugekommen. Für die theologisches Beurteilung dieser Forderung ist das Verhältnis der christlichen Kirchen zu den völkischen Unterschieden, insbesondere die Wirkung dieses Verhältnisses auf die Zulassung zu den kirchlichen Ämtern zu prüfen.</p> <p>§1. Nach dem Zeugnis des Neuen Testaments ist in Jesus Christus unserem Herrn, in seinem Sterben und Auferstehen der Wille Gottes zu Erfüllung gekommen, daß allen Menschen geholfen werde. Von der universalen Geltung diese Evangeliums ist kein Mensch, geschweige ein ganzes Volk auszuschließen. Alle zum Glauben gekommen sind nach dem Zeugnis des Apostels Eins in Christo. In der Verbundenheit mit Christus gibt es vor Gott keinen Unterschied zwischen Juden und Nichtjuden. Aber die allen Christen gemeinsame Gotteskindschaft hebt die biologischen und gesellschaftlichen Unterschiede nicht auf, sondern bindet jeden an den Stand, in dem er berufen ist (1. Kor. 7,20). Die biologische Bindung an ein bestimmtes Volk, der wir schicksalhaft nicht entinnen können, ist vom Christen mit Gesinnung und Tat auch anzuerkennen.</p> <p>§2. Die äußere Ordnung der christlichen Kirche hat nach reformatorischer Lehre im Unterschied von der römischen-katholischen nicht nur der Universalität des Evangeliums, sondern auch der historisch-völkischen Gliederung der christlichen Menschen zu entsprechen. Nach der Conf. Aug. VII ist die Forderung der Einheit auf die Reinheit der Lehre und der Sakramentsverwaltung zu beschränken. Die daneben mögliche Unterschiedenheit in anderen Fragen der Kirchenordnung wird von der Apologie erläutert durch den Hinweis darauf, daß in der alten Kirche die Judenchristen einer anderen Kirchenordnung folgten als die Heidenchristen (Apol. 4,42ff., Müller, 161). Das Eins-Sein in Christus ist für die lutherischen Bekenntnisse keine Frage der</p>	<p>biological criteria such as age, gender, and physical suitability, aside from the already existing criterion of belonging to the German Reich. In the stipulations quoted above, the requirement of Aryan ancestry has been newly added. To come to a theological assessment of this requirement, it is necessary to examine the relationship of the Christian churches to ethnic differences, especially the effect of this relationship on admission to ecclesial offices.</p> <p>§1. According to the witness of the New Testament, in Christ Jesus our Lord, in his death and resurrection, the will of God has come to fulfillment so that all people might be helped. No person, let alone an entire <i>Volk</i>, is to be excluded from the universal application of the Gospel. According to the testimony of the Apostle, all who have come to faith are one in Christ. In communion with Christ there is no distinction between Jew and non-Jew before God. But the status that all Christians share as children of God does not abolish biological and societal differences, but rather binds each person into the station into which he has been called (1 Corinthians 7:20). The biological bond to a particular <i>Volk</i>, which is a destiny that cannot be escaped, is to be respected by Christians both in disposition and deed.</p> <p>§2. According to Reformation doctrine, and in distinction from Roman Catholic teaching, the external ordinance of the church must correspond not only to the universality of the Gospel, but must also conform to the historical-ethnic classification of Christian peoples. According to Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, the requirement of unity is to be limited to purity of doctrine and administration of the sacraments. The Apology illustrates possible differences in other questions of church ordinance with evidence that, in the early church, the Jewish-Christians followed a different church-order than Gentile Christians (Apology 4:42ff., Müller, 161). Being one in Christ is for the Lutheran confessions</p>
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<p>äußeren Organisation, sondern des Glaubens.</p> <p>Diesen Grundsätzen entsprechen haben sich die aus der Wittenberger Reformation hervorgegangenen Kirchentümer den Grenzen der verschiedenen Völker eingefügt und in ihrer Kirchensprache, in Kultus und Verfassung die nationalen Eigentümlichkeiten nicht nur geschont, sondern zu ihrer Pflege und Erhaltung wesentliche beigetragen. Auch die äußere Mission der lutherischen Kirche war in steigendem Maße darauf bedacht, die Verkündigung des Evangeliums bei fremden Völkern in der Ordnung neuer, ihrer völkischen Art besonders entsprechender Volkskirchen sich vollenden zu lassen.</p> <p>§3. Ist die völkische Mannigfaltigkeit der äußeren Kirchenordnung eine notwendige Folge der sowohl schicksalhaften wie ethisch zu bejahenden völkischen Gliederung überhaupt, so ist ihr auch bei der Zulassung zu den Ämtern der Kirche von dem Zeitpunkt ab Rechnung zu tragen, wo eine Missionskirche zu Volkskirche geworden ist. Der Träger des geistlichen Amtes soll mit seiner Gemeinde in ihrer irdischen Existenz so verbunden sein, daß die ihr daraus erwachsenden Bindungen auch die seinen sind. Dazu gehört die Bindung an das gleiche Volkstum. Die reformatorischen Kirchen haben diesen Grundsatz in der Regel praktisch befolgt, auch schon ehe er theoretisch formuliert wurde.</p> <p>§4. Ob und wieweit dieser Grundsatz auch gegenüber den unter uns wohnenden Christen jüdischer Abstammung anzuwenden ist, bedarf besondere Erörterung. Es fragt sich zunächst, ob die in Deutschland ansässigen Juden im vollen Sinne dem deutschen Volke angehören oder eigenen Volkstums und somit ein Gastvolk sind. Die Kirche als solche kann das nicht entscheiden. Für sie ist freilich das jüdische Volk auch heute nicht ein Volk wie andere: es bleibt in Erwählung und Fluch das heilsgeschichtliche Volk, das Volk Jesu und</p>	<p>not a question of external organisation, but of faith.</p> <p>The national churches which emerged from the Wittenberg Reformation, according to these fundamental principles, have adapted themselves to the boundaries between different peoples, and have not only protected those boundaries in the vernacular language, the worship, and the makeup of each national particularity, but they have also contributed essentially to the cultivation and maintenance of those boundaries. The outward mission of the Lutheran church also increasingly came to consider how the proclamation of the Gospel among foreign peoples might be accomplished in the form of new ethno-national churches that specially correspond to their ethnic type.</p> <p>§3. Because the ethnic plurality of external church ordinance is a necessary result of ethnic classification in general, which is to be affirmed as both a matter of destiny and as a matter of ethics, admission to the offices of the church must be taken into account from the point in time at which a mission-church has become a ethno-national church. The bearer of the spiritual office should be so closely bound to his community in its earthly existence that the ties that bind his community are also his. This includes a bond to the same <i>Volkstum</i>. As a rule, the churches of the Reformation followed this principle in practice even before it was formulated as a theory.</p> <p>§4. Whether and to what extent this principle is to be applied also to those Christians of Jewish descent living among us requires special consideration. The first question is whether the Jews residing in Germany are members of the German <i>Volk</i> in a full sense or whether they are their own <i>Volkstum</i> living as a guest-people. The church as such cannot decide that. For the church, the Jewish <i>Volk</i> is certainly not, even today, a <i>Volk</i> just like any other: it remains the salvation-historical <i>Volk</i> in its election and curse, the <i>Volk</i> of Jesus and of</p>
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der Apostel nach dem Fleisch, als Volk aufbewahrt für eine endliche Geschichte Jesu Christi mit ihm (Matth. 23,39; Röm. 11). In seiner landlosen Zerstreuung durch die Völker erinnert es an die Grenzen aller völkischen Geschlossenheit, die Vorläufigkeit der Sonderung der Völker, and das eine Reiche Gottes, das durch den Israel verheißenen Christus kommt. Aber aus diesem Wissen der Kirche um die heilsgeschichtliche Einzigkeit und das Geheimnis des jüdischen Volkes ergibt sich nicht die Möglichkeit, die Frage zu entscheiden, ob das unter uns wohnende Judentum im vollen Sinne zum deutschen Volke gehört oder ein fremdes, ein Gastvolk ist. Auch nicht für die Judenchristen kann die Kirche diese Frage allgemeingültig, etwa durch den Hinweis auf das Sakrament der Taufe, beantworten. Das Bekenntnis der Kirche zur Heilsbedeutung der Taufe schließt als solches z.B. kein Urteil darüber ein, ob Eheschließungen zwischen Deutschen und getauften, christusgläubigen Juden im ganzen erwünscht oder zu wiederraten sind. Die Frage nach dem völkischen Verhältnis von Deutschtum und Judentum ist biologisch-geschichtlicher Art. Sie kann nur von unserem Volke, wie entsprechend von jedem anderen, im Blick auf seine besondere biologisch-geschichtliche Lage beantwortet werden.

§5. Das deutsche Volk empfindet heute die Juden in seiner Mitte mehr denn je als fremdes Volkstum. Es hat die Bedrohung seines Eingenlebens durch das emanzipierte Judentum erkannt und wehrt sich gegen diese Gefahr mit rechtlichen Ausnahmebestimmungen. Im Ringen um die Erneuerung unseres Volkes schließt der neue Staat Männer jüdischer oder halb-jüdischer Abstammung von führenden Ämtern aus. Die Kirche muß das grundsätzliche Recht des Staates zu solchen gesetzgeberischen Maßnahmen anerkennen. Sie weiß sich selber in der gegenwärtigen Lage zu neuer Besinnung auf ihre Aufgabe, Volkskirche der Deutschen zu sein, gerufen.

the apostles (according to the flesh), and the *Volk* being preserved for its final history with Jesus Christ (Matthew 23:39; Romans 11). In its landless dispersion throughout the peoples, Jewry reminds us of the limits of all ethnic national solidarity, the provisional nature of ethnic segregation, and of the Kingdom of God, which will come through the Christ who has been promised to Israel. But the church's knowledge of the salvation-historical uniqueness and the mystery of the Jewish *Volk* does not yield the possibility of deciding the question of whether the Jews living among us belong to the German *Volk* in the fullest sense, or whether it is a foreign guest-people. The church cannot give a universally valid answer to this question, even for Jewish Christians, through, for example, reference to the sacrament of baptism. The church's confession of baptism's salvific significance, as such, does not include, for instance, a judgment about whether marriages between Germans and baptised Jews who believe in Christ are wholly desirable or whether they are to be advised against. The question of the ethnic relationship between Germanness and Jewishness is biological and historical in nature. It can only be answered by our *Volk* as it relates to another *Volk* in view of its particular biological-historical situation.<sup>2</sup>

§5. Today more than ever the German *Volk* perceives the Jews in its midst as an alien *Volkstum*. It has recognised the threat to its own life posed by emancipated Jewry and has defended itself against this danger with legal exclusion clauses [i.e. barring Jews from civil service]. In the struggle for the renewal of our *Volk* the new state is excluding men of Jewish or half-Jewish descent from offices of leadership. The church must respect the fundamental right of the state to take such legislative measures. In this present situation, the church knows itself to be called to a new consciousness of its task: to be an ethno-national church for Germans. Today, this

<sup>2</sup> Althaus and Elert mean to communicate that every *Volk* has to answer the question of its own relationship to the Jews individually.

<p>Dazu gehört, daß sie heute ihren Grundsatz von der völkischen Verbundenheit der Amsträger mit ihrer Gemeinde bewußt neu geltend macht und ihn auch auf die Christen jüdischer Abstammung anwendet. Für die Stellung der Kirche im Volksleben und für die Erfüllung ihrer Aufgabe würde in der jetzigen Lage die Besetzung ihrer Ämter mit Judenstämmigen im allgemeinen eine schwere Belastung und Hemmung bedeuten. Die Kirche muß daher die Zurückhaltung ihrer Judenchristen von den Ämtern fordern. Ihre volle Gliedschaft in der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchen wird dadurch nicht bestritten oder eingeschränkt, so wenig wie die anderer Glieder unserer Kirche, welche die Voraussetzungen für die Zulassung zu den Ämtern der Kirche irgendwie nicht erfüllen.</p>	<p>task requires that the church must once again consciously assert its principle of ethnic solidarity between the bearer of a spiritual office and his community and apply this principle also to Christians of Jewish descent. In the present situation, to have men of Jewish stock occupy the church's offices would mean a severe strain on and inhibition of the church's position in the life of the <i>Volk</i> and for the fulfillment of its tasks. Therefore the church must require that its Jewish Christians be restrained from taking pastoral office. Their full membership in the <i>Deutsche Evangelische Kirche</i>, however, is not thereby denied or otherwise restricted, just as little as it is denied or restricted for those other members of our church who fail to meet the criteria for admission to the offices of the church in some other respect.</p>
<p>§6. Diese grundsätzliche Haltung bedeutet kein starres Gesetz, sondern läßt Raum für Ausnahmen von der Regel. Das staatliche ‚Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums‘ erkennt in der Feststellung der Ausnahmen von seinen Bestimmungen an, daß Juden z.B. durch die Bereitschaft zum Opfer des Lebens für Deutschland sich dem deutschen Volke eingliedern können. Damit ist zugestanden, daß die Grenze zwischen den Juden und dem deutschen Volke im einzelnen nicht starr, sondern fließend ist. Die Kirche selber weiß, daß auch und gerade die echte Bekehrung zu Jesus Christus einen Juden durch sein Einwurzeln in der Kirche aus der Fremdheit zur Gliedschaft am deutschen Volke führen kann.</p>	<p>§6. This basic position does not represent a hard and fast law, but rather leaves room for exceptions from the rule. In its statement of exceptions from its stipulations, the state's 'Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service' acknowledges, for example, that Jews can incorporate themselves into the German <i>Volk</i> through their willingness to sacrifice their lives for Germany. By this it is granted that the boundary between the Jews and the German <i>Volk</i>, in individual situations, is not rigid, but fluid. The church itself knows that a genuine conversion to Jesus Christ can lead a Jew directly out of foreignness from the German people to membership in the German people through his being rooted into the church.</p>
<p>Dem allen entspricht es, daß die Kirche in ihrer Ordnung ausdrücklich Raum läßt für die Ausnahme, daß zu ihren Ämtern Christen jüdischer oder halbjüdischer Abstammung zugelassen werden. Die Versehung kirchlicher Ämter durch Judenstämmige ist in unserer Kirche immer selten gewesen und soll auch in Zukunft den Charakter der Ausnahme behalten, muß als solche aber bei besonderen Führungen möglich bleiben.</p>	<p>It follows from all of this that the church, in its ordinance, explicitly leaves room for exceptions in which Christians of Jewish or half-Jewish descent may be admitted to its offices. The administration of the ecclesial office by men of Jewish stock has always been rare in our church and it should continue to maintain the character of an exception also in the future, but as such it must remain a possibility according to special direction.</p>



§7. Diese Ausnahme betrifft in erster Linie die Geistlichen und Amsträger jüdischer oder halb-jüdischer Abstammung, die schon im Amte stehen. Es verletzt das Wesen insonderheit des geistlichen Amtes, der Ordination und Berufung zu ihm, wenn die Kirche allgemein Geistliche jüdischer oder halb-jüdischer Abstammung, die sich im Dienste bewährt haben, lediglich wegen ihrer Abstammung aus dem Dienste entläßt. Nicht—wie im §3 des preußischen Kichengesetzes—ihre Belassung im Amte, sondern ihre Entlassung bedarf von Fall zu Fall besonderer Begründung. Die Fälle, in denen aus Anlaß der jüdischen Abstammung des Geistlichen unüberwindliche Schwierigkeiten zwischen den Pfarrer und der Gemeinde entstehen, sind nach den kirchlichen Vorschriften zu behandeln, die auch sonst für Fälle der Zerrüttung des Vertrauensverhältnisses zwischen Pfarrer und Gemeinde gelten. Die Kirche kann hier überall nicht einfach die Bestimmungen der staatlichen Gesetzgebung übernehmen, sondern muß nach Regeln handeln, die sich aus ihrem Wesen als Kirche ergeben.

Was schließlich die Fälle künftiger Zulassung von Männern jüdischer Herkunft zu den kirchlichen Ämtern anlangt, so wird die Kirche auch für die Begründung und Begrenzung dieser Ausnahmen eigene Grundsätze kirchlicher Art finden müssen. Sie weist die Entscheidung der einzelnen Fälle am besten ihren Bischöfen zu.

Erlangen, den 25. September 1933  
D. Paul Althaus D. Dr. Werner Elert  
Ordentliche Professoren der Theologie

§7. This exception concerns first of all those clergy and officials of Jewish or half-Jewish descent who are already in office. It would violate the essence of the pastoral office in particular, including ordination and calling to that office, if the church were, as a rule, to relieve from duty pastors of Jewish or half-Jewish descent, who have proven themselves faithful in service to the church, solely on the basis of their ancestry. Statement of extraordinary grounds should be required on a case-by-case basis not for their retention in office—as in Clause 3 of Prussian church bylaw—but for their dismissal. Cases in which insurmountable difficulties arise between the pastor and the community on account of the Jewish ancestry of the pastor should be handled according to the ecclesial regulations, which ordinarily apply in the event of a breakdown of the relationship of trust between the pastor and the congregation. Here the church cannot simply adopt the regulations of the state's legislation in every respect, but rather it must act according to the rules which arise out of its nature as the church.

Finally, as it concerns the admission of men of Jewish descent to the church's offices in future cases, the church must establish ecclesial principles to determine the justification for and limits of these exceptions. It is best that the church assign the decision of these individual cases to its bishops.

Erlangen, September 25, 1933  
DD. Paul Althaus and  
DD. Dr. Werner Elert  
Professors Ordinarius in Theology

## APPENDIX II | DER 'ANSBACHER RATSCHLAG' ZU DER BARMER 'THEOLOGISCHEN ERKLÄRUNG'

<p>Die in der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche seit ihrer Bildung im Jahre 1933 entstandene Spaltungen [<i>sic</i>] nötigen alle ihre Glieder zu Besinnung auf den Grund und den Umfang ihr eigenen kirchlichen Bindung. Insbesondere sind alle Träger des Pfarramts dazu verpflichtet, um den fragenden oder irre gewordenen Gliedern unserer Kirche kraft ihres Lehramts antworten und helfen zu können. Daher schließen wir uns im Glauben an die Verheißung unseres Herrn für alle, die sich in seinem Namen versammeln, zu gemeinsamer theologischer Arbeit zusammen. Wir unterscheiden dabei die Grundlagen und die Aufgaben unserer Arbeit wie folgt:</p> <p>A. Die Grundlagen.</p> <p>1. Die Kirche Jesu Christi als Werkstatt des heiligen Geistes ist gebunden an Gottes Wort. Daher sind ihre Glieder dem Worte Gottes zum Gehorsam verpflichtet.</p> <p>In den Bekenntnissen unserer evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche erkennen wir die reine Darlegung des Inhalts der Heiligen Schrift. Daher sind die Glieder der Kirche auch ihnen zum Gehorsam verpflichtet.</p> <p>Wir stimmen überein mit Löhes Verständnis der Reformation: ‚Sie ist vollendet in der Lehre, sie ist unvollendet in den Folgen der Lehre.‘</p> <p>Ebenso stimmen wir dem Wort des Erlanger Theologen Gottfried Thomasius zu: ‚Ich weiß mich überhaupt im Hause meiner Kirche nicht als Knecht, sondern als ein Kind und finde in diesem Stande beides, die Gebundenheit der Pietät und die Kindesfreiheit.‘</p> <p>2. Das Wort Gottes redet zu uns als Gesetz und Evangelium. Die kirchliche Verkündigung hat sich danach zu richten. Das Evangelium ist die Botschaft von dem für unsere Sünde gestorbenen und um</p>	<p>The divisions which have arisen within the <i>Deutsche Evangelische Kirche</i> since its formation in 1933 compel all of its members to reflection on the foundation and the scope of their own ecclesial commitment. In particular, all bearers of the pastoral office are obligated to do so, in order to be able, by virtue of their teaching responsibility, to respond to and to help those members of our church who are questioning or have fallen into error. Therefore we join in this shared theological work, united by faith in the promise of our Lord for all who gather together in his name. We distinguish the fundamental principles and the tasks of our theological work as follows:</p> <p>A. The fundamental principles.</p> <p>1. The church of Jesus Christ, as a workplace of the Holy Spirit, is bound to the Word of God. Its members are therefore obligated to obedience to the Word of God.</p> <p>In the confessions of our evangelical Lutheran church we recognise the pure explanation of the content of the Holy Scripture. The members of the church are likewise obligated to obedience to these confessions.</p> <p>We concur with Wilhelm Löhe's understanding of the Reformation: 'It is perfect in doctrine, but it is imperfect in the implementation of that doctrine.'</p> <p>Likewise, we agree with the word of the Erlangen theologian Gottfried Thomasius: 'In the household of my church I perceive myself by no means as a servant, but as a child, and in this station I find both the duty to piety and the freedom of a beloved child.'</p> <p>2. The Word of God addresses us as Law and Gospel. The church's proclamation must conform to this fact. The Gospel is the message of the Lord Jesus Christ, who</p>
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<p>unserer Gerechtigkeit willen auferweckten Herrn Jesus Christus.</p> <p>3. Das Gesetz, „nämlich der unwandelbare Wille Gottes“ (Form. Conc. Epi. VI,6), begegnet uns in der Gesamtwirklichkeit unseres Lebens, wie sie durch die Offenbarung Gottes ins Licht gesetzt wird. Es bindet jeden an den Stand, in den er von Gott berufen ist, und verpflichtet uns auf die natürlichen Ordnungen [<i>sic</i>], denen wir unterworfen sind, wie Familie, Volk, Rasse (d.h. Blutzusammenhang). Und zwar sind wir einer bestimmten Familie, einem bestimmten Volk und einer bestimmten Rasse zugeordnet. Indem uns der Wille Gottes ferner stets in unserem Heute und Hier trifft, bindet er uns auch an den bestimmten historischen Augenblick der Familie, des Volkes, der Rasse, d.h. An einen bestimmten Moment ihrer Geschichte.</p> <p>4. Die natürlichen Ordnungen geben uns aber nicht nur den fordernden Willen Gottes kund. Indem sie in ihrer Verbindung unsere gesamte natürliche Existenz begründen, sind sie zugleich die Mittel, durch die Gott unser irdische Leben schafft und erhält. Wer im Glauben an Jesus Christus der Gnade des Vaters gewiß wird, erfährt auch in ihnen ‚lauter väterliche, göttliche Güte und Barmherzigkeit.‘</p> <p>Als Christen ehren wir mit Dank gegen Gott jede Ordnung, also auch jede Obrigkeit, selbst in der Entstellung, als Werkzeug göttlicher Entfaltung, aber wir unterscheiden auch als Christen gütige und wunderliche Herren, gesunde und entstellte Ordnungen.</p> <p>5. In dieser Erkenntnis danken wir als glaubende Christen Gott dem Herrn, daß er unserem Volk in seiner Not den Führer als ‚frommen und getreuen Oberherrn‘ geschenkt hat und in der nationalsozialistischen Staatsordnung ‚gut Regiment,‘ ein Regiment mit ‚Zucht und Ehre‘ bereiten will.</p>	<p>died for our sins and rose from the dead for the sake of our justification.</p> <p>3. The Law, “namely the unchangeable will of God” (Formula of Concord, Article VI:6), confronts us in the total reality of our life as it is brought to light through the revelation of God. It binds each person to the station into which he has been called by God, and obligates us to the natural orders to which we are subject, such as family, <i>Volk</i>, and race (that is, blood relationship). And indeed we have been assigned to a particular family, a particular <i>Volk</i>, and a particular race. As the will of God meets us always in our here and now, it binds us also to the particular historical moment of our family, our <i>Volk</i>, and our race—that is, to a particular point in time in their history.</p> <p>4. The natural orders, however, do not merely make known to us the demanding will of God. While the orders ground our complete natural existence, they are at the same time the means by which God creates and maintains our earthly life.<sup>1</sup> Whoever is certain of the grace of the Father through faith in Jesus Christ also experiences ‘genuine fatherly and divine goodness and mercy’ in the orders.</p> <p>With thanks to God we as Christians honour each ordinance, as well as each authority, even in their distortion, as the instrument of divine unfolding, but we also distinguish as Christians between benevolent and strange rulers, between healthy and sick ordinances.</p> <p>5. In this knowledge we thank the Lord God as believing Christians that he has gifted our <i>Volk</i>, in its time of crisis, with a <i>Führer</i> as a ‘pious and faithful ruler,’ and, in the National Socialist system of government, God wishes to give a ‘good regiment,’ a regiment with ‘discipline and honour.’</p>
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<sup>1</sup> This is a critical point for the Althausian articulation of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*: by laying claim to humanity’s total reality, the orders ground human existence, rather than the other way around.

<p>Wir wissen uns daher vor Gott verantwortlich, zu dem Werk des Führers in unserem Beruf und Stand mitzuhelfen.</p> <p>B. Die Aufgabe.</p> <p>6. Die Kirche hat zu den natürlichen Ordnungen ein dreifaches Verhältnis. Sie hat erstens das Gesetz Gottes zu verkündigen. In dieser Hinsicht ist ihre Aufgabe zu allen Zeiten die gleiche. Das bedeutet Begründung der Ordnungen in ihrer Hoheit und Erinnerung an ihre Aufgabe.</p> <p>Zweitens sind ihre Glieder selbst den natürlichen Ordnungen unterworfen. Indem sie immer einem bestimmten Volk und einem bestimmten Augenblick zugeordnet sind, empfängt ihre Verpflichtung gegenüber ihrem Volk den konkreten Inhalt durch die gegenwärtige völkische Staatsordnung. In dieser Hinsicht unterliegt die Beziehung der Kirchenglieder auf die natürliche Ordnungen der geschichtlichen Veränderung. Unveränderlich ist dabei nur das Verpflichtsein als solches.</p> <p>Drittens trägt die Kirche selbst Ordnungsmerkmale, die auch den natürlichen Ordnungen anhaften. So folgt sie z.B. in der Sprache ihrer Verkündigung der Mannigfaltigkeit der Volkssprachen. In dieser Hinsicht ist ihre Ordnung ebenfalls der geschichtlichen Veränderung unterworfen.</p> <p>7. Durch die Veränderlichkeit der Beziehung zu den konkreten Ordnungen im dritten Sinne ist die Kirche vor die Aufgabe gestellt, ihre eigene Ordnung immer aufs neue zu überprüfen.</p> <p>Der unbedingt gültige Maßstab für diese Überprüfung ist der Auftrag, den sie von ihrem Herrn erhalten hat. Er erstreckt sich auf den Vollzug und den Inhalt ihrer Verkündigung, auf Verwaltung der Sakramente und der Schlüsselgewalt durch das geordnete Predigtamt. Alle sonstigen Merkmale ihrer geschichtlichen Gestalt, hauptsächlich ihre Verfassung und ihr Kultur, sind zu messen an diesem Maßstab.</p>	<p>We acknowledge ourselves, therefore, to be responsible before God to assist in the work of the <i>Führer</i> in our vocation and station.</p> <p>B. The task.</p> <p>6. The church has a threefold relationship to the natural orders. In the first place, it must proclaim the Law of God. In this respect its task is the same in all ages. This entails giving reasons for the sovereignty of the ordinances and bearing their function in mind.</p> <p>Second, the church's members are themselves subject to the natural orders. As they are always assigned to a particular <i>Volk</i> and to a specific moment, their duty to the <i>Volk</i> receives its concrete content through the peoples' present national system of government. In this respect the relationship of church members to the natural ordinances is subject to historical change. The only thing that is unchangeable is the existence of the obligation itself.</p> <p>Third, the church itself bears characteristics of an ordinance, which also adhere to the natural orders. Thus the church follows, for example, the plurality of folk-languages in the language of its proclamation. In this respect the church's ordinance is likewise subject to historical change.</p> <p>7. Through the variability of the relationship to the concrete ordinances in the third sense, this task is posed to the church: to continually examine its own ordinance.</p> <p>The unconditionally valid standard for this examination is the mission that the church has received from its Lord. This mission comes to bear on the implementation and the content of its proclamation, on the administration of the sacraments, and on the key power of the established preaching</p>
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<p>In diesem Sinne ist die Aufgabe einer Reformation der Kirche in jedem Augenblick neu gestellt.</p> <p>8. Der Erfüllung dieser Aufgabe in der Kirche unserer Tage soll auch unsere theologische Arbeit und unser kirchlicher Einsatz dienen.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ansbach, den 11. Juni 1934 Ansbacher Kreis Pfarrer und Direktor Sommerer – Bruckberg, D. Althaus – Erlangen, D. Dr. Elert – Erlangen, Studienrat Fikenscher – Ansbach, Stadtpfarrer Fuchs – Ansbach, Pfarrer Griebach – Ansbach, Pfarrer Seiler – Wildenholz, Pfarrer Werlin – Kleinhaslach über Ansbach</p>	<p>office.<sup>2</sup> All other characteristics of its historical form, chiefly its constitution and its culture, are to be measured against this standard. In this sense the task of reforming the church is posed anew in each moment.</p> <p>8. Our theological work and church mission should also serve the accomplishment of this task in the church of our day.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ansbach, June 11, 1934 The Ansbach Circle Sommerer, Pastor and Director – Bruckberg, DD. Althaus – Erlangen, DD. Dr. Elert – Erlangen, Fikenscher, Teacher – Ansbach, Fuchs, Parish Priest – Ansbach, Griebach, Pastor – Ansbach, Seiler, Pastor – Wildenholz, Werlin, Pastor – Kleinhaslach über Ansbach</p>
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<sup>2</sup> *Predigtamt* is a technical term used to describe one of the primary roles of the Protestant pastor: a ‘servant of the Word.’ In the context of a state church, this term also communicates the preaching office as instituted or sanctioned by the state.

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